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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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At Niti, TN CM demands 50% share in taxes

Modi urges for states to cooperate and work with Centre; Siddaramaiah, Vijayan skip meet

Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin during a Niti meeting, in New Delhi on Saturday **PHOTO: PTI**

CHENNAI/NEW DELHI, 24 MAY

The 10th Governing Council meeting of Niti Aayog on Saturday, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, saw calls from Opposition Chief Ministers for fairer allocation of national resources, even as the PM urged all states to collaborate for a "Viksit Bharat by 2047".

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin, addressing the meet, criticised the Centre's discriminatory approach towards fund allocation. Highlighting a tussle with the BJP-led Union government, Stalin cited that over Rs 2,000 crore had been withheld from Tamil Nadu, partly due to disagreements over the three-language clause in the National Education Policy—currently under judicial review.

Stalin urged the Centre to ensure "non-discriminatory cooperation" to all states, stating that in a federal democracy, it was "not ideal for states to struggle, argue, or litigate" to receive rightful dues.

This, he said, obstructs both state and national development.

Making a strong fiscal case, Stalin pointed out that although the 15th Finance Commission recommended that 41 per cent of the Union's divisible tax revenue be shared with states, only 33.16 per cent has been devolved over the past four years.

Meanwhile, state contributions to centrally sponsored schemes have increased, further straining their finances. He called for the states' share to be raised to 50% and urged the Union government to "seriously consider" this demand.

Despite his criticism, Stalin commended Modi's vision for a $30 trillion economy and a developed India by 2047.

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann also raised concerns, asserting that his state lacked water to share with neighbouring Haryana—a long-standing inter-state dispute.

The meeting's theme, 'Viksit Rajya for Viksit Bharat@2047', highlighted Centre-state cooperation for national development. However, notable absences marked the event. Chief Ministers of Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Telangana were scheduled to attend but skipped the meeting. Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan also deputed representatives. Puducherry Chief Minister N Rangasamy of the NDA coalition was another no-show. Briefing reporters about the meeting, Niti Aayog CEO BVR Subrahmanyam said the meeting was attended by 31 states and Union Territories of a total of 36. Modi on said the global investors are hugely interested in India and the states should utilise this opportunity to attract investments by removing policy bottlenecks, as he stressed that if the Union government and states work together like Team India, no goal is impossible. *—PTI*

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Three-year-old Dalit girl raped, killed in Andhra

KAMBALADINNE, 24 MAY

A three-year-old Dalit girl was allegedly raped and murdered in Kambaladinne village, Kadapa district. Police said the incident occurred around Friday noon, when a 25-year-old man, Rahmatullah, took the girl behind a wedding venue and committed the crime. Additional Superintendent of Police Prakash Babu confirmed Rahmatullah's arrest, stating, "He is in our custody." According to police reports, Rahmatullah attended the wedding and lured the girl behind the hall, where he assaulted and smothered her to death. Authorities have registered cases against him under the SC, ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act. The incident has sparked outrage in the region. ***—PTI***

X faces global outage, restored

BENGALURU, 24 MAY

Social media platform X, formerly Twitter was suddenly disrupted on Saturday evening. Outage tracking site DownDetector reported of over 2,200 users being unable to send messages or view their feeds on X during the peak of outrage at 6pm. Many users also had to deal with broken links. The popular social media platform could not be accessed on both desktop and mobile. However, the technical outrage was soon addressed, allowing users to share their feeds and connect with others on the site. The company is yet to issue a statement stating the cause behind the glitch. ***—Agencies***

K'taka reports 35 Covid cases as Belagavi woman tests +ve

BELAGAVI/BENGALURU, 24 MAY

Karnataka has reported 35 active Covid-19 cases, with Belagavi district registering its first case as a 25-year-old pregnant woman tested positive at a private hospital. The woman, who was suffering from pneumonia, had recently travelled to Pune in Maharashtra, where 60 cases and three Covid related deaths have been reported in April.

District Health Officer Dr Eshwar Gadadi stated that the woman is currently undergoing treatment at the private hospital. The facility has been directed to establish isolated wards to prevent the virus's spread. As per state health directives, isolation wards with five beds each have also been set up in all government hospitals in the district.

Belagavi, the largest district in Karnataka geographically, had remained Covid-free until now, even as most cases in the current uptick have been concentrated in Bengaluru, which accounts for 32 of the 35 active cases in the state.

In an official advisory issued on Friday, the government noted a gradual increase in Covid cases over the past 20 days, **PHOTO: PTI**

Amid the rise in cases, Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao urged the public not to panic. "I appeal to everyone not to be alarmed. The media should avoid exaggerating the severity of the situation," he said at a press briefing in Bengaluru.

Rao assured that the state government is on alert and taking all necessary precautions. He also clarified that there are no restrictions on travel or movement within the state or country. He added that a sub-variant of the JN.1 strain, previously detected in Southeast Asia, could be responsible for the spike. "There is no panic in those countries, and there should be none here," he said. *—Salar News with Agencies*

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Belagavi mutt head kidnaps, rapes minor

BELAGAVI, 24 MAY

A swami was arrested for allegedly kidnapping and repeatedly raping a minor girl in Raibag taluk of Belagavi district, police said on Saturday. The accused, Hathayogi Lokeshwar Swami, 30, of a Ram Mandir in Mekali village was arrested on Thursday. The incident began on 13 May when the accused allegedly offered the 17-year-old girl a lift when she was heading home from a relative's house in a village. The complaint alleged that Lokeshwar Swami kidnapped her and repeatedly raped her in lodges in Raichur and Bagalkot from 13 May to 15 May. He then gave her some money and left her at a bus stand. *—Salar News*

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'NO MORE GOODWILL'

A dam on the Indus river system **PHOTO: PTI**

Pak ended principles of Indus Treaty: MEA

NEW DELHI, 24 MAY

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has stated that India's decision to put the Indus Waters Treaty in abeyance is a natural response to Pakistan's breach of the treaty's foundational principles, including friendship and goodwill. The MEA explained that recent changes on the ground—such as advances in engineering, climate change, and glacier melting—necessitate a renegotiation of the treaty's terms. These views are being communicated by Indian delegations visiting global capitals, especially in the wake of the recent Pahalgam terror attack, which prompted India to suspend the agreement.

Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri highlighted that the 1960 treaty's preamble emphasises that it was concluded in a spirit of goodwill and friendship, principles which Pakistan has effectively set aside, according to India. Misri briefed a parliamentary committee on India's actions, including Operation Sindoor, and has engaged with seven multi-party delegations visiting 33 countries.

'Incorrect to clash as conflict in Kashmir'

The recent confrontation between India and Pakistan was not a "conflict in Kashmir", External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar asserted, saying such a description would be like putting the perpetrator and the victim of the Pahalgam attack at the same level. The "horrific" strike in Pahalgam was aimed at creating a "fear psychosis", destroying Jammu and Kashmir's tourism sector and was meant to "sow religious discord, he said. *—PTI*

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B'LURU BOY SHINES IN CET

CET Engineering topper Bhavesh Jayanthi of Chaitanya Techno School, Marathahalli, receives a kiss from his grandmother Urmila Devi in Bengaluru on Saturday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD** ***>>>More on Page 2***

Govt nod to 8.25% interest for EPF

NEW DELHI, 24 MAY

The Indian government has officially approved an interest rate of 8.25 per cent on employees' provident fund (EPF) deposits for the financial year 2024-25. This allows the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) to credit the annual interest to the accounts of over 70 million subscribers.

The decision was made during the 237th meeting of the EPFO's central board of trustees, chaired by Union Minister for Labour & Employment Mansukh Mandaviya, on 28 February. The interest rate, retained at 8.25 per cent, matches the previous fiscal year's rate, which was declared in February 2024 after a marginal increase from 8.15 per cent in 2022-23.

The Ministry of Finance has given its concurrence for the rate, and the labour ministry confirmed that the approved interest will now be credited to the accounts of EPF subscribers. The steady interest rate supports long-term savings, offering comparatively higher and stable returns compared to many fixed-income instruments.

Historically, the EPF interest rate has fluctuated. In 2021-22, it was reduced to 8.1 per cent — the lowest since 1977-78 — from 8.5 per cent in 2020-21. EPF remains a popular savings scheme, providing secure, steady growth for retirement savings, especially given its relatively high interest rate compared to other fixed-income options. *—PTI*

Pakistani intruder shot dead by BSF in Gujarat

The Border Security Force (BSF) shot dead a Pakistani intruder attempting to cross into India from the international border in Gujarat, an official report said. The BSF troops, on high alert, spotted a suspicious individual near the border fence in Banaskantha on Friday night.

IN INEBRIATED STATE

City man pours acid on wife after fight over loud music on phone

BENGALURU, 24 MAY

A man allegedly poured toilet cleaner acid on his wife following an argument between the couple over the volume of music playing on his mobile phone here, police said on Saturday.

The incident occurred on 19 May at NMH layout in Sidedahalli in North Bengaluru, they said.

The 44-year-old woman who sustained injuries over her head and face is now stated to be out of danger. She is recuperating at a hospital here.

According to police, the woman, who is beautician by profession, alleged that around 9 pm, her husband asked her for money to buy liquor. When she refused, he began harassing her. Eventually, he managed to get money.

- The 44-year-old woman who sustained injuries over her head and face is now stated to be out of danger. She is recuperating at a hospital here.

Later, he came home drunk and started playing songs on his mobile phone at high volume. When she requested him to keep it down, he refused.

This led to an argument between the couple. He then brought a bottle of toilet acid cleaner from the bathroom and allegedly poured it over her head and face, he said.

As she cried for help, he fled the spot, police said,

The victim was rushed to hospital by the neighbours.

"We have case has been registered and efforts are being made to nab her husband. Further investigation is underway," he added. *—PTI*

Monsoon reaches Kerala, earliest since 2009

NEW DELHI, 24 MAY

The southwest monsoon has reached Kerala on Saturday, marking its earliest arrival over the Indian mainland since 2009, when it arrived in the southern state on 23 May, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

Typically, the monsoon begins over Kerala by 1 June and covers the entire country by 8 July. It usually starts retreating from northwest India around 17 September and withdraws completely by 15 October. Last year, the monsoon set in over Kerala on 30 May; in 2023, it arrived on 8 June; in 2022, on 29 May; and in 2021, on 3 June.

Historical data since 1975 shows the earliest arrival was in 1990, on 19 May — 13 days before the usual date. However, meteorologists emphasise that early or late onset over Kerala does not necessarily correlate with the total rainfall across the country, given the large-scale variability influenced by regional and global factors.

Typically, the monsoon begins over Kerala by 1 June and covers the entire country by 8 July **PHOTO: PTI**

The IMD forecasted above-normal rainfall for 2025, with no El Niño conditions expected, which are typically associated with below-average monsoon rainfall. Normal rainfall ranges from 96 to 104 per cent of the 50-year average of 87 cm. Less than 90 per cent indicates deficient rainfall, while more than 110 per cent indicates excess.

- The IMD forecasted above-normal rainfall for 2025, with no El Nino conditions expected, which are typically associated with below-average monsoon rainfall.

India experienced 934.8 mm of rainfall in 2024 — 108 per cent of the average — the highest since 2020. In 2023, rainfall was 820 mm, or 94.4 per cent of the average. The monsoon is vital for agriculture, supporting around 42 per cent of the population and contributing 18.2 per cent to GDP, while also replenishing reservoirs for water and power. *—PTI*

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PHOTO: SALAR

One killed, two injured in serial collision in Hebbal

BENGALURU, 24 MAY

A tragic three-vehicle collision on the Hebbal flyover early Saturday morning resulted in the death of a 25-year-old sanitation truck driver, Faizan Ahmad, from Bihar. Faizan was repairing a broken-down BBMP garbage truck with his cleaner, Marghoob Raza, 23, when a speeding truck loaded with quarry stones crashed into them around 1.40am. The impact overturned the garbage truck, fatally injuring Faizan, while the heavy truck subsequently struck an MUV car ferrying passengers from the airport to Sarjapur before colliding with the flyover's side wall. The occupants of the MUV escaped without injury despite the significant damage to their vehicle. Passersbys rushed Faizan to Baptist Hospital, where he was pronounced dead on arrival. *—Salar News*

Police seize mobile, cash from City prison

BENGALURU, 24 MAY

In an unexpected early morning operation, city police raided the Parappana Agrahara Central Prison, uncovering prohibited items such as a mobile phone, a charger, an electric stove, and Rs 16,000 in cash during a three-hour search. The raid, which commenced at 7am and concluded at 10am, was led by a Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) alongside an Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP), supported by five inspectors and a contingent of 175 personnel. This operation followed reports of illegal activities within the prison, particularly the use of mobile phones by inmates. An FIR has been lodged at the Parappana Agrahara police station, with investigators exploring how these items breached the facility's high-security measures and who may have facilitated their entry. This action follows a violent incident on 14 May, involving a scuffle between inmates that left two injured, prompting increased scrutiny of prison operations. *—Salar News*

Vendors to be evicted from pavements, says DKS

Promises that GBA will be operational by 15 September

BENGALURU, 24 MAY

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar announced that street vendors encroaching pavements in Bengaluru will be evicted in a phased manner, as part of a wider civic overhaul under the proposed Greater Bengaluru Authority. Speaking at a press conference following a meeting on the new authority, Shivakumar said 27,665 street vendors have registered so far, of whom 3,755 have applied for push carts. "Registered vendors must conduct business only in designated areas. Some are pressuring MLAs, but we cannot allow illegal vending under the law," he said.

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar PHOTO: PTI

He confirmed that the division of Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) will be completed by 15 September, after which the Greater Bengaluru Authority will be formally constituted. "We've issued a notification effective from 15 May. New corporations will be formed within 120 days after seeking feedback from MLAs," he added.

On road development, he said MLAs have discussed widening projects and land acquisition. Transferable Development Rights (TDRs) will be issued as compensation where MLAs recommend acquisition. Around 300 km of roads will be developed along stormwater drain buffer zones.

Shivakumar also ordered the removal of illegal optical fibre cables laid through sewage lines and directed desilting of drains. Efforts to digitise 25 lakh property khatas into e-khatas are ongoing, with five lakh already completed. "This has brought transparency to property registration and tax collection, and has won a national e-governance award," he noted.

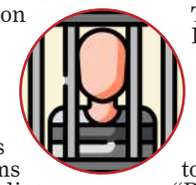
A compensation of Rs 10,000 will be issued to households affected by recent flooding. Plans to build a sky deck have shifted from Hemmigepura to Kempe Gowda Layout due to aviation regulations. Abandoned vehicles parked for over 21 days will be moved to a 100-acre dumping yard and auctioned. The City also plans to merge service and main roads along metro routes to ease traffic over 40–50 km of arterial stretches. *—ANI*

Belagavi swami held for repeatedly raping minor

BELAGAVI, 24 MAY

A swami was arrested for allegedly kidnapping and repeatedly raping a minor girl in Raibag taluk of Belagavi district, police said on Saturday.

The accused, Hathayogi Lokeshwar Swami, 30, of a Ram Mandir in Mekali village was arrested on Thursday.



The victim was taken to the temple by her family after some relatives suggested that her illness and other problems could be cured, police said, where the two likely got acquainted.

In her complaint, the 17-year-old victim alleged that the offence occurred on 13 May.

The accused allegedly offered to give her a lift when she was heading home from a relative's house in a nearby village.

She alleged that then Lokeshwar Swami kidnapped her and repeatedly raped her in lodges in Raichur and Bagalkot from 13 May to 15 May.

After the offence, he left her at the Mahalingpur bus stand and threatened to kill her if she disclosed the incident to anyone, a senior police officer said.

The matter came to light after the victim narrated about the offence to her father a few days later.

Following this, her father encouraged her to file a complaint.

"Based on her complaint, a case under relevant sections of the Protection of Children Against Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act was registered against the Swami and he was arrested on Thursday," he added.

Police also recovered various iron weapons from the swami's residence

—Salar News with Agencies

CM cautions against polarisation in Niti speech

NEW DELHI/MYSURU 24 MAY

State Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, in his speech tabled in the NITI Aayog meeting cautioned against rising polarisation and erosion of trust in institutions.

He had skipped the meeting in New Delhi citing prior engagements in his home town Mysuru.

"Rising polarisation, exclusionary narratives, and erosion of trust in institutions weaken the very foundations of our Republic. We must reaffirm our commitment to pluralism, justice, and the rule of law," his speech said.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah eats at Indira Canteen in Mysuru PHOTO: SALAR

India 2047 should not just be a slogan; it must be a challenge and a calling for everyone—A challenge to close the gaps of inequality, and a calling to rise together as a federation of empowered states, he said.

Siddaramaiah set a goal of achieving 100 per cent piped water to every household and establishing State as South Asia's electric vehicle capital and turning every taluk into a Skill District in the next three years.

Doubling the area under organic farming and expanding early warning systems to all vulnerable regions are other goals for the next 1,000 days.

"This is not merely an administrative plan, but a moral promise," he said.

Siddaramaiah skipped the meeting to inaugurated nine Indira Canteens in Hinakal, which aim to provide affordable meals to economically weaker sections of society.

"This year we're starting 184 new canteens," he announced.

"These Indira canteens which were inaugurated by Rahul Gandhi are now successfully running across the State."

He then hit out at the BJP for ignoring the canteens during their tenure.

On the occasion of Basava Jayanthi, Siddaramaiah also announced that the Anubhava Mantap worth Rs 600 crores will be inaugurated in 2025.

—Salar News with Agencies

PHONE TAPPING CASE

IPS officer Alok Kumar's promotion uncertain

BENGALURU 24 MAY

The promotion of senior IPS officer Alok Kumar to the rank of Director General of Police (DGP) now lies in doubt, as the State government has reportedly ordered a fresh departmental inquiry into the 2019 phone tapping controversy — despite an earlier probe into the matter having been concluded.

Alok Kumar, a 1994-batch IPS officer currently serving as Additional Director General of Police (Training), has sent a legal notice to the Chief Secretary of the state, challenging the move. Official records accessed through RTI show that the earlier departmental inquiry was closed with government approval, yet no promotion was granted.

The allegations date back to Kumar's tenure as a senior officer in City during the Congress-JD(S) coalition era. He was accused of unauthorised phone tapping and illegal collection of call data records of over 50 individuals. Though the CBI later filed a closure report, the case remains legally active due to objections by another senior retired officer, according to sources who added that the fresh inquiry could pave the way for Bengaluru Police Commissioner B Dayananda — from the same IPS batch — to be promoted instead.

—Salar News

Alok Kumar PHOTO: PTI

- State government has reportedly ordered a fresh departmental inquiry into the 2019 phone tapping controversy, where Kumar was among the prime accused of illegal collection of call data

Tejasvi submits 15-point plan to transform City

BENGALURU, 24 MAY

BJP MP Tejasvi Surya on Saturday proposed a comprehensive 15-point agenda aimed at modernising the City's civic administration, traffic management and public transport systems.

The action plan was sent for consideration as Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar convened a meeting of City MPs and MLAs to deliberate on infrastructure.

According to the statement, Surya suggested formation of a Bengaluru 2050 Vision Group, a think tank comprising domain experts, civic leaders and elected representatives to chart a long-term roadmap for the City.

He sought for technology-driven traffic management initiatives to decongest City roads through smart signals, real-time monitoring, AI-based interventions and better traffic flow optimisation on high-density corridors.

Surya stressed on revamp of public transport services, including strengthening BMTC, integrating last-mile connectivity, promoting multi-modal transport options and accelerating Metro and Suburban Rail projects. *—PTI*

Three of family die by suicide in HD Kote after daughter elopes

MYSURU, 24 MAY

Three members of a family allegedly died by suicide by jumping into a Hebbal reservoir in HD Kote taluk of Mysuru district.

Police recovered the bodies of trio; Mahadevaswamy, 55, resident of Budanur village of HD Kote taluk, his wife Manjula, 42, and their younger daughter Harshitha, 19.

The trio arrived on a bike on the early hours on Saturday, jumped into the reservoir after leaving behind a suicide note on their bike, police said. Passersbys who saw their slippers near the bike, alerted the police.

According to the initial investigation, police suspect that they took the drastic step as they were upset after Mahadevaswamy's elder daughter eloped with a youth recently, as shown in a complaint filed the relatives of deceased at HD Kote police station.

HD Kote police are verifying the details of the suicide note.

—Salar News

(Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support.)

BJP LAUNCHES PROTESTS DEMANDING PRIYANK'S RESIGNATION

KALABURAGI, 24 MAY

The BJP is set to stage a major protest titled 'Kalaburagi Chalo' in Kalaburagi, demanding the removal of State Minister Priyank Kharge from the Cabinet over the recent incident in Chittapur.

The protest comes in the wake of the 21 May incident, where Congress workers allegedly laid siege to a guest house in Chittapur, - Priyank Kharge's home constituency - Kalaburagi, where the Leader of Opposition in the State Legislative Council, Chalavadi Narayanswamy, was staying.

Narayanswamy compared his treatment during previous protests with the current political atmosphere. He said, "Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah was once the Leader of Opposition. Back then, during our government, when a small protest happened in Kodagu, he was arrested, but we still gave him full security and treated him with respect. But now, Congress leaders like Mallikarjun Kharge are making disrespectful remarks. He even called RSS and BJP supporters 'dogs' and claimed none of them took part in the freedom struggle."

Similarly, BJP President BY Vijayendra slammed the Congress for "dictatorial and rowdy" attitude,

"We demand that Priyank Kharge resigns immediately. They keep speaking about BR Ambedkar," he said. "If they have faith in Baba Sahab Ambedkar, he should tender his resignation because of the rowdy attitude he and his supporters have shown. We have given a memorandum to the Governor."

Echoing, BJP leader Rajkumar Patil accused Priyank Kharge of misusing his official position to target political rivals. *—PTI*

The protest come after Congress workers allegedly attacked a guest house in Chittapur, Priyank Kharge's constituency PHOTO: SALAR

HARD WORK PAYS OFF

City students dominate KCET 2025

BENGALURU 24 MAY

Bhavesh Jayanti, Satvik B, Dinesh Gomathi, Harish Raj DV and Akshay M Hedge PHOTOS: MOHAMMED ASAD

The Karnataka Common Entrance Test (KCET) 2025 results were officially declared on Saturday, with students from Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) securing top ranks in the engineering stream. Minister for Higher Education MC Sudhakar announced the results at a press conference, revealing that 2,62,195 ranks were declared for engineering aspirants alone.

City's Bhavesh Jayanti of Chaitanya Techno School, Marathahalli secured the first rank in engineering with a staggering 99.06 per cent, followed by Satvik B Biradar from the same school's Uttarahalli branch. Dinesh Gomathi Shankar Arunachalam, also from Chaitanya, stood third.

In other professional courses too, City students performed strongly. Harish Raj DV from Narayana e-Techno, Yelahanka bagged the top ranks in Bachelor of Naturopathy and Yogic Sciences (BNYS), Veterinary, and Nursing. His peer, Athreya Venkatachalam of National Public School, HSR Layout, also consistently figured among the top three in multiple streams including Pharmacy and BNYS.

Overall, the Karnataka Examinations Authority (KEA) received 3.30 lakh applications this year, of which 3,11,991 candidates appeared. Ranks were allotted to 2,75,677 candidates across various courses. Significant numbers include- BNYS (1,98,679), Agriculture (2,14,588), Veterinary (2,18,282), B. Pharm (2,66,256), Pharm-D (2,66,757), and BSc Nursing (2,08,171).

This year's exam system was upgraded with facial recognition in the official mobile app to prevent impersonation. All centres had live webcasting. For the first time, over 11.67 lakh OMR sheets were uploaded online, accessible for public scrutiny.

Sudhakar also clarified technical errors that occurred during the announcement of engineering toppers, attributing it to confusion in merging eligibility and PU exam scores. The government claims to have improved helpline services by expanding the system from five to ten lines, now operational daily from 5am to 8pm.

Document verification has already been completed online in advance of the counselling process.

The seat selection process is expected to commence shortly after NEET results are declared. *—Salar News*

Although the motives are unclear, police have arrested Shankar Gooli, the husband of former Congress Mahila district president Manjula and are on the hunt for one more PHOTO: SALAR

Yadgir Congress office torched; 1 held

YADGIR, 24 MAY

Miscreants set fire to the Yadgir district Congress office located near Kanaka Circle in Yadgir city.

The incident reportedly occurred around midnight on Friday, when unknown individuals poured petrol and set the office ablaze.

The miscreants brought about 20 litres of petrol in a can, which they left at the scene and fled.

Furniture, including sofas, air conditioners were completely destroyed in the fire, police said.

Upon hearing of the incident, the District Congress President along with other party leaders rushed to the spot and conducted an inspection.

Shankar Gooli, husband of former Congress Mahila district president, Manjula, has been arrested for his alleged involvement.

Police are looking for another individual, Bapu Gowda, 55, who has managed to escape.

Authorities are working to determine the exact motive behind the vandalism.

—Salar News

Jagan raps police for torturing YSRCP leader's son

VIJAYAWADA, 24 MAY

YSRCP chief YS Jagan Mohan Reddy has alleged that an "undeclared emergency" is unfolding in Andhra Pradesh, citing the alleged custodial torture of a party leader's son by the state police in Tangada village in Palnadu district. Reddy shared a video on X showing Harikrishna's wife, children, parents and relatives staging a protest, raising serious allegations against the police. Locals also raised anti-police slogans. The video showed a middle-aged man in an orange shirt, believed to be Harikrishna, sitting battered on the floor and later limping as a policeman helped him walk. Harikrishna had allegedly stabbed a man over a previous dispute and was booked under Section 109 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Uddhav's stand on alliance with Raj is positive: Raut

MUMBAI, 24 MAY

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut on Saturday said their party is positive about an alliance with the Raj Thackeray-led Maharashtra NavnirmanSena (MNS). Estranged cousins Raj and Sena (UBT) Chief Uddhav Thackeray had sparked speculations about a possible reconciliation if they could ignore "trivial issues" and join hands for the sake of "Marathi manoos." "Uddhavji's stand regarding an alliance with Raj Thackeray is "manase" and "dil se" (from the mind and the heart)," Raut said. Local body elections in Maharashtra are slated to be held later in 2025. *—PTI*

TN DyCM: DMK unafraid of raids by ED or PM Modi

PUDUKKOTTAI, 24 MAY

Tamil Nadu Deputy Chief Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin has said DMK is unafraid of raids by Enforcement Directorate (ED) or Prime Minister Narendra Modi, vowing to confront the cases legally. Speaking in Pudukkottai, he affirmed that party would continue advocating for state rights and would not be intimidated. He, criticised opposition AIADMK's accusations that CM MK Stalin rushed to Delhi for Niti Aayog meeting amid ED searches on TASMAC offices. *—PTI*

At UN, India blames Pak for ending IWT

India says Pak violated spirit of IWT by inflicting three wars, thousands of terror attacks

UNITED NATIONS, 24 MAY

.India ripped through Pakistan's "disinformation" at the UN on the Indus Waters Treaty, asserting that Islamabad violated its spirit by inflicting three wars and thousands of terror attacks on India that seek to hold hostage lives of civilians, religious harmony and economic prosperity.

"We are constrained to respond to the disinformation being carried out by the delegation of Pakistan with regard to the Indus Waters Treaty. India has always acted in a responsible manner as an upper riparian state," India's Permanent Representative to UN Ambassador Parvathaneni Harish said on Friday.

Harish was addressing the UN Security Council Arria Formula meeting organised by the Permanent Mission of Slovenia on 'Protecting Water in Armed Conflict – Protecting Civilian Lives.'

Harish highlighted four aspects to expose the "disinformation" by Pakistan, which spoke about India's decision to suspend the Indus Waters Treaty.

In the wake of the horrific 22 April Pahalgam attack in Jammu and Kashmir, India had decided that the Indus Waters Treaty of 1960 would be held in abeyance with immediate effect until Pakistan credibly and irrevocably abjures its support for cross-border terrorism.

Harish told the UN meeting that India had entered into the Indus Waters Treaty 65 years ago in good faith. The Indian envoy underlined that in the last four decades, more than 20,000 Indian lives have been lost in terror attacks, the most recent of which was the dastardly targeted terror attack on tourists in Pahalgam.

The Indian side responded strongly to the Pakistani actions. The on-ground hostilities ended with an understanding on stopping the military actions following talks between the directors general of military operations of both sides on 10 May.

Harish told UN Security Council that Pakistan has repeatedly used civilian cover to advance the cause of terrorism. *—PTI*

India's Permanent Representative to UN Ambassador Parvathaneni Harish *PHOTO: PTI*

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SIT begins probe against minister Vijay

BHOPAL, 24 MAY

A Special Investigation Team, formed on the orders of the Supreme Court, has begun its probe into the controversial remarks by Madhya Pradesh Minister Vijay Shah, one of its members said on Saturday.

The three-member SIT has started meeting people in Raykundda village near Mhow in Indore district, where Shah made the objectionable comments aimed at Colonel Sofiya Qureshi on May 12, police sources said.

Sagar Zone Inspector General of Police Pramod Verma heads the SIT, while Special Armed Forces DIG Kalyan Chakrvarthy and Dindori. *—PTI*

Congress leader and LoP in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi meets people affected by the recent Pakistani shelling, at a gurudwara in Poonch, Jammu & Kashmir, on Saturday *PHOTO: PTI*

Rahul meets shelling victims, pledges to raise their issue

POONCH, 24 MAY

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Saturday met the victims of the cross-border shelling by Pakistani troops in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch, terming the damage as a "big tragedy." He pledged to highlight their plight at the national level.

The Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha visited Poonch town and interacted with the affected population, including families who lost their members in the shelling.

"I stand strongly with the victim families -- I will definitely raise their demands and issues at the national level," Rahul said on X.

He was accompanied by senior Congress leaders.

Gandhi meet victims of the Pahalgam terror attack, several leaders and stake holders during his visit to Srinagar on 25 April.

28 people, including 13 in Poonch district were killed and over70 injured across Jammu and Kashmir in the cross-border shelling.

Gandhi also visited shell-hit structures. *– PTI*

Pakistan Mukku *PHOTO: X*

Kerala seeks govt nod to rename 'Pakistan Mukku'

KOLLAM, 24 MAY

A CPI (M)-ruled panchayat in Kerala has decided to approach the state government with a request to change the decades-old name of a village junction in the aftermath of the India-Pakistan conflict. Kunnathoor Panchayat in this district unanimously agreed to forward a proposal to rename "Pakistan Mukku" following a formal request from a BJP ward member, during a recent meeting. According to Panchayat president Valsala Kumari K, the panchayat does not have the authority to rename places and therefore decided to forward the request to the government. *– PTI*

Gujarat man arrested for sharing sensitive info with Pak spy

AHMEDABAD, 24 MAY

The Gujarat Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS) has arrested a contractual health worker posted in the border district of Kutch for allegedly sharing sensitive information about military establishments with a Pakistani spy, officials said on Saturday.

Accused Sahdevsinh Gohil, 28, was lured by a Pakistani agent, who identified herself as Aditi Bharadwaj, to share information about under-construction as well as existing establishments of Border Security Force and Indian Navy in area, said ATS in a release.

Since June 2023, Gohil, a resident of Lakhpat taluka of Kutch, had shared photos and videos of various BSF and naval facilities in Kutch district via WhatsApp. *– PTI*

Will not bow to terrorism: All-party delegation

NEW DELHI, 24 MAY

India's diverse political leaders are on international missions to reaffirm the nation's steadfast stance against terrorism. Congress MP Shashi Tharoor, leading a delegation to Guyana, Panama, Colombia, Brazil, and the US, declared, "We will not be silenced by terrorism." He emphasised India's commitment to peace, democracy, and freedom, highlighting the importance of global support in confronting terror threats linked to Pakistan.

TMC MP Abhishek Banerjee in Japan said the all-party delegation are travelling tonations with evidence against Pakistan *PHOTO: PTI*

Meanwhile, Supriya Sule of NCP-SP, leading a team to Qatar, South Africa, Ethiopia, and Egypt, stressed the need for national unity. "This is not politics; it's about India," she said, condemning the Pahalgam attack and calling for a collective response free of political disputes.

In Japan, TMC MP Abhishek Banerjee described Pakistan as a "vile handler" of terror, urging the world to unite against cross-border terrorism. *– PTI*

Amid India's criticsim, Pak claims all its nukes are safe

ISLAMABAD, 24 MAY

Pakistan's Foreign Office (FO) has stated that the country's command and control structures for nuclear weapons remain robust and secure. In a formal statement, the FO expressed full confidence in Pakistan's comprehensive nuclear security regime, asserting that international concern should focus more on India's expanding nuclear arsenal.

The FO criticised India's political climate, media, and society, alleging that escalating radicalisation raise legitimate nuclear security concerns.

Meanwhile, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh called on Thursday for Pakistan's nuclear weapons to be brought under International Atomic Energy Agency oversight, claiming they are unsafe in what he termed a "rogue nation".

Singh's comments followed Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent warning against "nuclear blackmail" and threats of punishing cross-border terrorism.

Tensions between the neighbours heightened after the Pahalgam attack, which killed 26 people. India responded with precision strikes on terror infrastructure in Pakistan and Pakistani-controlled Kashmir.

Pakistan attempted to attack Indian military bases on 8, 9, and 10 May, prompting strong retaliation from India. An on-ground escalation was halted following military talks on 10 May, with both sides agreeing to cease hostilities. *– PTI*

J&K suspends mobile internet in Bhaderwah until 27 May

JAMMU, 24 MAY

The Jammu and Kashmir government has ordered a temporary suspension of mobile internet services in parts of Bhaderwah in Doda district until 27 May, citing threats of misuse by "anti-national elements." The order affects 37 towers—19 Reliance Jio and 18 Airtel—following recommendations from IGP Bhim Sen Tuti.

Principal Secretary (Home) Chandraker Bharti stated the suspension would be effective from 8pm on 22 May to 8pm on 27 May. The Jammu Zone IGP, authorised under the Telecommunications Rules, directed telecom providers to suspend mobile data services, including 2G, 3G, 4G, 5G, and public Wi-Fi.

The government cited concerns that mobile data could be exploited to disrupt public order or threaten national sovereignty and security. The move aims to safeguard the region's stability amid ongoing tensions. *– PTI*

AHEAD IN BIHAR ELECTION

Ahead of electoral battle, RJD, NDA engage in social media war

PATNA, 24 MAY

The NDA and the RJD, the two main rivals in politics of Bihar, where assembly polls are due in a few months, on Saturday made the use of social media and animation technology to pin each other down.

On its X handle, the RJD, which hopes that its young leader Tejashwi Yadav will rise to power, trained its guns at Chief Minister and JD(U) supremo Nitish Kumar.

In an animated video, with a background commentary rendered like a "rap" number, Kumar has been called "paltu" (a turncoat) whose "baate hain faltu" (talks nonsense).

Notably, the longest-serving CM of Bihar has also had two short-lived alliances with the RJD, headed by his arch rival Lalu Prasad, and Yadav, the latter's younger son and heir apparent, occupied the post of deputy Chief Minister on both occasions.

Now in the opposition, the RJD minced no words in voicing its frustration, as it wondered whether the septuagenarian had allegedly applied "fevicol" to his seat of power, to retain it despite "political somersaults".

Tejashwi Yadav and Nitish Kumar *PHOTO:X*

- Notably, the longest-serving CM of Bihar has also had two short-lived alliances with the RJD, headed by his arch rival Lalu Prasad, and Tejashwi, the latter's younger son and heir apparent, occupied the post of deputy Chief Minister on both occasions.

Although the barbs were aimed at the JD(U) supremo, it was the alliance partner BJP, known to have superior machinery, that came forward to pay the opponent in the same coin.

The saffron party's Bihar unit came out with two videos on its X handle to deride Prasad and his family, who controls the opposition party. *– PTI*

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other state leaders pose for a photograph at the Niti Aayog meeting held on Saturday *PHOTO: PTI*

At NITI meet, Mann asks Centre to stop 'biased' treatment

NEW DELHI, 24 MAY

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann condemned Centre's "biased" treatment of the state, particularly over the water-sharing dispute with Haryana. Mann called for the construction of the Yamuna-Sutlej-Link canal, criticised the Bhakra Beas Management Board's handling of water releases, and demanded an end to the deployment of CISF at Bhakra Nangal dams.

At 10th Niti Aayog Governing Council meeting in Delhi, PM Narendra Modi chaired discussions on accelerating India's development towards 2047 Viksit Bharat goal.

Andhra Pradesh CM N Chandrababu Naidu proposed creating three sub-groups to boost GDP, population management, and technology-driven governance, praising India's economic rise and transformative reforms like Digital India and GST.

Meanwhile, congress leader Jairam Ramesh dismissed the meeting as an "exercise in hypocrisy." BJP and Congress also criticised West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee for skipping event.

Telangana CM A Revanth Reddy on Saturday called on PM and sought approval for Hyderabad Metro Rail Phase-II project of Rs 24,269 crore. *– PTI*

Kavitha fumes as letter to dad gets leaked

BENGALURU, 24 MAY

Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) party MLC K Kavitha has taken offence on her letter to her father and party president K Chandrasekhar Rao getting leaked.

She claimed of there being some conspiracies within the party. "Rao is like a God surrounded by some devils," she claimed. She said she had toured half of Telangana and expressed the negative and positive aspects of the party's recent public meeting at Warangal.

The negative feedback related to Rao's silence on issues like 42 per cent reservation for backward classes, scheduled caste categorization and Waqf Amendment Act.

Kavitha also said that the party would prosper if leaders favouring other parties are asked to leave. Some BRS members preferred the BJP. *–Agencies*

National Herald: BRS asks Revanth to quit

HYDERABAD, 24 MAY

BRS Working President KT Rama Rao on Saturday called for Telangana Congress leader Revanth Reddy to step down after the Enforcement Directorate (ED) named him in a chargesheet related to the National Herald case. Rama Rao criticised the move, claiming it has damaged the state's honour at the national level.

He urged Revanth Reddy to resign voluntarily or for the Congress central leadership to ensure his resignation to facilitate an impartial investigation. The BRS leader also announced plans to submit a representation to Governor Jishnu Dev Varma seeking the prosecution of the Chief Minister.

Rama Rao questioned Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's silence on the issue, asking why he had not responded, given that Revanth Reddy, a former PCC chief and Telangana CM, was among those named in the chargesheet. He accused both Congress and BJP of having a tacit understanding, alleging the NDA government was shielding Revanth Reddy amid corruption allegations.

The ED's chargesheet, filed on 9 April. *– PTI*

PHOTO: X

'Jai Ho', 'Son of Sardaar' actor Mukul Dev no more

MUMBAI, 24 MAY

Renowned actor Mukul Dev, celebrated for his performances in films such as 'Son of Sardaar' and 'Jai Ho' has died at the age of 54, his brother Rahul Dev confirmed on Saturday. Dev died in a New Delhi hospital following issues linked to deteriorating health, coinciding with the recent passing of his mother, which had reportedly affected his well-being. Vindu Dara Singh, a close friend, mentioned that Dev had been unwell for a week, with plans for a photo shoot for 'Son of Sardaar 2' remaining unfulfilled due to his condition.

His last rites will be performed in Nizamuddin West on Saturday. Known for supporting roles in Hindi, Punjabi, Bengali, and Telugu cinema, Dev is survived by his daughter, Sia. *—PTI*

Four killed in Andhra road accident

GUVVALACHERUVU, 24 MAY

A tragic accident occurred in Kadapa district on Saturday, resulting in the deaths of four individuals, including two children. The victims were travelling in a car when a furniture-laden truck crashed into them on Guvvalacheruvu ghat road at approximately 9.30am. Srikanth, a software engineer from Bengaluru, was travelling with his family to Chintaputtayapalle village. Out of the six occupants in the vehicle, four lost their lives, including Srikanth, his wife, their daughter, and a nephew. Two adults survived the collision with injuries, but are reported to be out of danger. Authorities have registered a case and are investigating the incident. The local police have not disclosed further information regarding the truck driver or potential charges. *—PTI*

Man buried alive as workers dump sludge on him in UP

BAREILLY, 24 MAY

In a shocking incident, Sunil Kumar Prajapati, a 45-year-old vegetable vendor, was buried alive under sludge dumped by civic workers in UP's Bareilly on Thursday. Prajapati was found unconscious after a sewer cleaning team, led by worker Naem, emptied a tractor-trolley filled with waste where he was sleeping under a tree near a cemetery. In a horrific turn of events, Prajapati's son discovered his father buried under the debris and with local assistance, he was pulled out. Despite being rushed to a hospital, doctors pronounced him dead upon arrival. The local police have registered a case against the responsible civic workers following a complaint from the victim's father. *—PTI*

Man arrested after video of assaulting daughter goes viral

KANNUR, 24 MAY

A man has been apprehended by local police after a shocking video allegedly depicting him assaulting his eight-year-old daughter went viral on social media. In the alarming footage, the child is seen being beaten and having her head slammed against a wall while she cries in fear. The accused, identified as Jose, alias Mamachan, had claimed the video was a prank, supposedly aimed at reuniting the children with their estranged mother. However, local authorities do not believe this claim, with Deputy Superintendent of Police K Vinod Kumar stating, "Even if it is a prank, such behaviour cannot be excused." Following public outcry, the two children have been placed under the care of their paternal aunt, while the investigation into the incident continues, promising legal action against the father. *—PTI*

NB181, LF7 variants of Covid detected in TN, Gujarat

These variants are reportedly behind rising cases in Asia

NEW DELHI, 24 MAY

One case of Covid-19 variant NB181 and four instances of the LF7 type have been detected in India, according to Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium (INSACOG) data.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) classifies LF7 and NB18 sub-variants as Variants Under Monitoring, not as Variants of Concern or Variants of Interest. But these variants are reportedly driving the rise in Covid cases in China and parts of Asia.

One case of NB.1.8.1 was identified in Tamil Nadu and four cases of LF.7 were detected in Gujarat.

In India, the most common variant remains JN.1, comprising 53 per cent of samples tested, followed by BA.2 (26 per cent) and other Omicron sublineages (20 per cent).

NB.1.8.1's spike protein mutations such as A435S, V445H, and T478I suggest increased transmissibility and immune evasion compared to other variants.

As of 19 May, the country had 257 active Covid-19 cases *PHOTO: PTI*

As of 19 May, the country had 257 active Covid-19 cases.

The Director General of Health Services and experts from the National Centre for Disease Control, Indian Council of Medical Research and other health institutions recently reviewed the situation.

Delhi recorded 23 new cases, Andhra Pradesh reported four in the last 24 hours, Telangana confirmed one and a nine-month-old in Bengaluru tested positive. While Kerala reported 273 cases in May alone, 10 cases of Covid-19 were detected in Maharashtra's Thane.

- A 55-year-old woman has been placed under home quarantine after she tested positive for Covid-19 in UP's Noida. Her family members are being tested for the infection.

The Thane civic body held a high-level review meeting to assess the situation and readiness of the health system. A dedicated 19-bedded ward has been set up at Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Hospital in Kalwa.

A 55-year-old woman has been placed under home quarantine after she tested positive for Covid-19 in UP's Noida.

Her family members are being tested for the infection. *—PTI*

AFTER JUSTICE OKA'S TERM

Justice BV Nagarathna to enter Collegium

NEW DELHI, 24 MAY

Justice BV Nagarathna, in line to become the first woman Chief Justice of India (CJI), is set to become a member of the Supreme Court Collegium after the retirement of Justice Abhay S Oka.

Justice Nagarathna will officially become part of the collegium on 25 May and will be part of it until she retires as CJI in October, 2027.

The Collegium will now comprise Chief Justice Bhushan Ramkrishna Gavai, Justice Surya Kant, Justice Vikram Nath, Justice JK Maheshwari and Justice Nagarathna.

CJI Gavai will convene his inaugural collegium meeting on 26 May to address SC's vacancies and make crucial appointments in several high courts.

After Justice Oka's retirement, there will be a vacancy of three judges in the top court.

Under the collegium system five top judges of the apex court recommend the appointment, transfer and elevation of judges to the SC and the 25 high courts.

The government can return the recommendation to the collegiums. It usually accepts the recommendation if it is reiterated by the collegium. Justice Nagarathna, born on October 30, 1962, is the daughter of former CJI E S Venkataramiah.

She practised in the fields pertaining to the Constitution, commerce, insurance and service. *—PTI*

SC ORDERS CAPF CADRE REVIEW

NEW DELHI, 24 MAY

The Supreme Court has directed to conduct a cadre review in all the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) within six months.

The Department of Personnel and Training was directed to take an appropriate decision within three months of receiving the action taken report from the Ministry of Home Affairs.

The court heard pleas seeking Non Functional Financial Upgradation, cadre review and restructuring and amendment of recruitment rules to eliminate IPS deputation.

The pleas stated that due to lateral entry into CAPFs' higher grades, promotion gets delayed. *—PTI*

Alleged fraudster Angad Chandhok deported from US

NEW DELHI, 24 MAY

Alleged fraudster Angad Singh Chandhok, wanted for alleged fraud in India, was brought here after his deportation from the US in an operation coordinated by the CBI.

A US court convicted Chandhok in 2022 for being part of an international tech support scam that defrauded Americans, mostly elderly, of their life savings, the US Department of Justice said in a statement after his conviction in 2022.

"An Indian national who sought asylum in the United States and then played a critical role in ensuring that an international tech-support scheme succeeded in defrauding Americans, many of them elderly, of their life savings, has been sentenced to six years in federal prison, announced US Attorney Zachary A Cunha," it said.

Angad Singh Chandhok *PHOTO: PTI*

- A US court convicted Chandhok in 2022 for being part of an international tech support scam that defrauded Americans, mostly elderly, of their life savings, the US Department of Justice said in a statement after his conviction in 2022.

He was also wanted in India for fraud cases.

In California, Chandhok allegedly operated a long-running and complex money laundering network, in which he created and used shell companies to move millions of dollars stolen from Americans through an online tech support scheme, and later an online travel fee scheme, the statement said.

Chandhok, with five others working under him, was in direct contact with high-ranking international members of the scheme. *—PTI*

HC grants bail to man accused of raping girl

NEW DELHI, 24 MAY

The Delhi High Court has granted anticipatory bail to a man accused of sexually assaulting a 10-year-old girl, after noting inconsistencies in her statements. Justice Ravinder Dudeja highlighted that the forensic evidence did not corroborate the girl's allegations, which were made in 2023. In the order issued on 21 May, Justice Dudeja remarked, "It may not be apposite at this stage to make any observation on the merits of the allegations... however, there are conflicting statements from the prosecutrix at this stage." The court observed that, despite the girl's samples undergoing forensic analysis, no male DNA profile was generated from the evidence collected. *—PTI*

Sources confirmed that the operation was initiated following intelligence reports regarding the leaders' whereabouts *PHOTO: PTI*

Red alert on amid rain fury in Kerala

T'PURAM, 24 MAY

Kerala is bracing for heavy rainfall as the India Meteorological Department (IMD) has issued red and orange alerts for several districts over the coming days. A red alert has been sounded in Kannur and Kasaragod, with an orange alert for the remaining 12 districts today. For Sunday, five districts are on red alert and nine on orange alert, while Monday will see red alerts in 11 districts and orange in three.

The IMD confirmed the arrival of the monsoon in Kerala, marking its earliest onset since 2009, arriving eight days ahead of schedule. The last early onset was recorded on 23 May, 2009. Strong winds and heavy overnight rains have already caused considerable damage, uprooting trees, dislodging electricity poles, and waterlogging roads across the state.

State Revenue Minister K Rajan acknowledged the early rainfall, stating that the worst of the weather is expected in the districts north of Kozhikode, Idukki, and Pathanamthitta. He warned of the potential for flash floods and landslides due to sudden, heavy downpours and assured that district authorities are prepared for emergency situations. Rajan urged the public to exercise caution and advised against sharing unverified information on social media. *—PTI*

Strong winds and heavy overnight rains have already caused considerable damage, uprooting trees, dislodging electricity poles, and waterlogging roads across the state *PHOTO: PTI*

2 Naxalite leaders killed in Jharkhand

RANCHI, 24 MAY

In a significant security operation on Saturday, two prominent leaders of the Jharkhand Jan Mukti Parishad, a breakaway Naxalite faction, were killed by security forces in Latehar district in Jharkhand.

The deceased include Pappu Lohara, who had a bounty of Rs 10 lakh on his head, along with Prabhat Ganjhu, who was carrying a Rs 5 lakh reward.

Sources confirmed that the operation was initiated following intelligence reports regarding the leaders' whereabouts. In addition to the fatalities, an injured accomplice from the group has been apprehended and an INSAS rifle recovered from his possession.

The security forces indicated that their operation was still underway as they aimed to neutralise further threats from the renegade outfit, which has been linked to various acts of violence and unrest in the region.

Official statements around the incident have not yet been released, but the successes in this operation are a notable measure in the continued efforts to combat Naxalite insurgency in Jharkhand. The government has been under increasing pressure to enhance security and ensure peace in the rural areas affected by Naxalite activities. *—PTI*

Top ULFA(I) commander arrested in Assam

DIBRUGARH/TINSUKIA, 24 MAY

Rupam Asom, the 'operational commander' of the proscribed militant group ULFA (I), has been apprehended in a forested area near the Assam-Arunachal Pradesh border, as confirmed by a senior police officer. Ongoing operations are targeting additional cadres of the outfit in the vicinity.

Rupam has been implicated in running an extortion racket in parts of Assam and is named in a chargesheet by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) regarding the murder of Bhaskar Kalita, the officer-in-charge at Bordumsa Police Station, in 2018.

Tinsukia Superintendent of Police, Abhijit Gaurav, reported that Rupam's activities had been under surveillance for the past four to five months. Following specific intelligence regarding his presence in the Margherita area of Tinsukia district, a joint operation was initiated, resulting in his arrest. Authorities recovered a firearm and incriminating documents from his possession.

Rupam Asom *PHOTO: PTI*

Gaurav noted that Rupam is wanted in various cases, including extortion, bomb blasts, kidnappings, and attacks on security forces. The operation continues in the area, marking a significant setback for ULFA (I) activities in the region. The collaborative effort involved Assam Police, Assam Rifles, and military intelligence. *—PTI*

PLASTIC-FOR-MEALS

Rural India re-imagines sanitation solutions

NEW DELHI, 24 MAY 2025

India's path to reaching the milestone of having 77 per cent of its villages as ODF Plus Model has been quietly paved by local experiments ranging from plastic-for-meals drives to tourism-funded waste management systems.

A village can attain ODF Plus Model status once it sustains its open defecation-free position, has solid and liquid waste management arrangements, observes visual cleanliness and displays ODF Plus information, education and communication messages.

Over 5.10 lakh villages have arrangements for solid waste disposal, while over 5.26 lakh have systems for liquid waste management. More than 1,200 biogas plants are registered and over 6.38 lakh vehicles have been deployed for waste collection.

Suman Dangi of Bhushli village in Haryana's Karnal district ask people to bring 500 grams of clean, recyclable plastic and get a hot meal in return.

PHOTO: FREEPIK

- A village can attain ODF Plus Model status once it sustains its open defecation-free position, has solid and liquid waste management arrangements, observes visual cleanliness and displays ODF Plus information, education and communication messages.

Her self-help group has collected over 1,500 kilograms of plastic and served more than 3,000 meals.

Christened 'Mera Plastic, Meri Jimmedari', women of the Unchadeeh village panchayat in Uttar Pradesh's Sonbhadra district are given a pack of sanitary pads for every 2 kg of plastic waste they collect.

In Ghorawal block, Parmeshwar Pal, a village head, collects plastic waste in an e-rickshaw daily .

Uttarakhand's Sirasu village funds its cleanliness drive through tourism. Since 2018, the local panchayat has charged Rs 1,000 for pre-wedding photo shoots and rented out tents and lighting equipment to generate Rs 50 lakh.

Backyard farming transformed Ghokito village in Nagaland's Niuland district. Vegetable peels and leftovers are cooked with wheat bran and green leafy vegetables to create feed for pigs.

There over 1,825 rural plastic waste units across the country. *—PTI*

TRUMP SANCTIONS PUTS HARVARD'S ALLURE AT RISK

The actions follows Harvard's decision in April to reject federal directives aimed at curbing pro-Palestinian protests *PHOTO: X*

For students around the world, an acceptance letter to Harvard University has represented the pinnacle of achievement, offering a spot among the elite at a campus that produces Nobel Prize winners, captains of industry and global leaders.

That allure is now in jeopardy. In its intensifying fight with the White House, Harvard was dealt its heaviest blow yet on Thursday, when the government blocked the Ivy League school from enrolling foreign students. The move threatens to undermine Harvard's stature, revenue and appeal among top scholars globally.

Even more than the government's USD 2.6 billion in research cuts, the administration's action represents an existential threat for Harvard. The school summed it up in a lawsuit seeking to block the action: "Without its international students, Harvard is not Harvard."

Within hours of the decision, the consequences started becoming clear. Belgium's Princess Elisabeth, who just finished her first year in a Harvard graduate programme, is waiting to find out if she can return next year, the palace said. The Chinese government publicly questioned whether Harvard's international standing will endure.

"The relevant actions by the US side will only damage its own image and international credibility," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said at a briefing in Beijing.

A federal judge on Friday blocked the administration's decision as the lawsuit plays out, but the order is only temporary.

Students say their hopes and dreams are at stake

On the Harvard campus, international students said they were stunned, confused and deeply concerned about what the government's action means for their degrees, future plans and legal status in the United States.

Walid Akef, a Harvard graduate student in art history from Egypt, said the Trump administration action would cost him "20 years of my life."

"Coming to Harvard — I'm not exaggerating — I planned for it for 15 years," Akef said. He earned two master's degrees and learned multiple languages before arriving at the university. He also worries what the changes will mean for his family, since his wife is pregnant and will soon be unable to travel.

"This is absolutely disastrous. I'm going to lose not just stability, but I also lose my dreams and then lose, I don't know, my beautiful life."

Akef is cautiously optimistic that Harvard "will take care of this," but he is also considering other options as US policy becomes increasingly inhospitable to foreign students.

A graduating law student from Asia said he had planned to stay in the United States and find work, "but not anymore."

"I don't know what I'll do, but my future doesn't appear to be here," said the student, who spoke on condition of anonymity out of fear of retaliation.

Changes could erase a quarter of student body

With a USD 53 billion endowment, Harvard can weather federal funding losses that would cripple other institutions. But this new sanction strikes at the heart of its campus.

Already, the change is causing disarray, as thousands of students consider whether to transfer or risk being in the country illegally. It could wipe out a quarter of the university's student body, while halving some of its graduate schools and threatening students who work as researchers and teaching assistants. Some sports teams would be left nearly empty.

For many, it has been a time of panicked calls home and huddles with fellow international students. For Kat, a data science student from China, the news comes as she prepares to graduate. Foreigners set to receive degrees from Harvard next week can still do so.

"My biggest fear is whether I would get deported immediately" after graduation, Kat said. She spoke on the condition that she be identified only by her first name out of concern about retaliation. "We're not sure about our status."

If the government's action stands, Harvard would be banned from admitting new international students for at least two school years. Even if it regains its place as a global magnet, top students may shy away for fear of future government reprisals, the school said in its lawsuit.

The university enrols almost 6,800 foreign students at its campus in Cambridge, Massachusetts, near Boston. Roughly 30 per cent of those come from India and China.

Asked if he was considering restrictions on other universities, President Donald Trump said Friday: "We're taking a look at a lot of things."

"Harvard's going to have to change its ways. So are some others," the president told reporters in the Oval Office. "We don't want troublemakers here" from other countries.

A time to weigh other opportunities

In its court filing, Harvard listed some of its most notable alumni who enrolled as foreign students. The list includes Benazir Bhutto, the former prime minister of Pakistan; Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the former president of Liberia; Empress Masako of Japan; and many leaders of major corporations.Many of the world's top students spend years preparing for their college applications, sometimes working with admissions consultants such as Crimson Education, a company named after Harvard's school colour.

Crimson clients recently admitted to Harvard were shocked by the government's action, said Jamie Beaton, a Harvard alumnus from New Zealand who founded the company. But rather than looking for other options, many students quickly shifted to finding a way forward with Harvard, he said.

Still, some current students and those bound for the university in the fall were weighing other opportunities. Two universities in Hong Kong on Friday extended invites to affected students.

"It feels like my world has exploded," said Fang, a Chinese student who was accepted to Harvard for a master's programme. She also spoke on the condition that only her first name be used out of fear that she could be targeted.

Her student visa was approved just this week. "If America becomes a country that doesn't welcome me, I don't want to go there."

The recent developments forced Aleksandra Conevska, a Canadian graduate student researching climate change, to cancel her summer research and briefly look for jobs in Canada. But her thinking has since shifted, and she says she plans to remain at Harvard.

"I've already invested in this country, and I'm not going to give in," she said.

The US government's action against Harvard has dominated news in countries around the world, said Mike Henniger, president and CEO of Illume Student Advisory Services, which helps colleges in the US, Canada and Europe recruit international students. He is travelling in Japan and awoke to the news Friday with dozens of emails from colleagues.

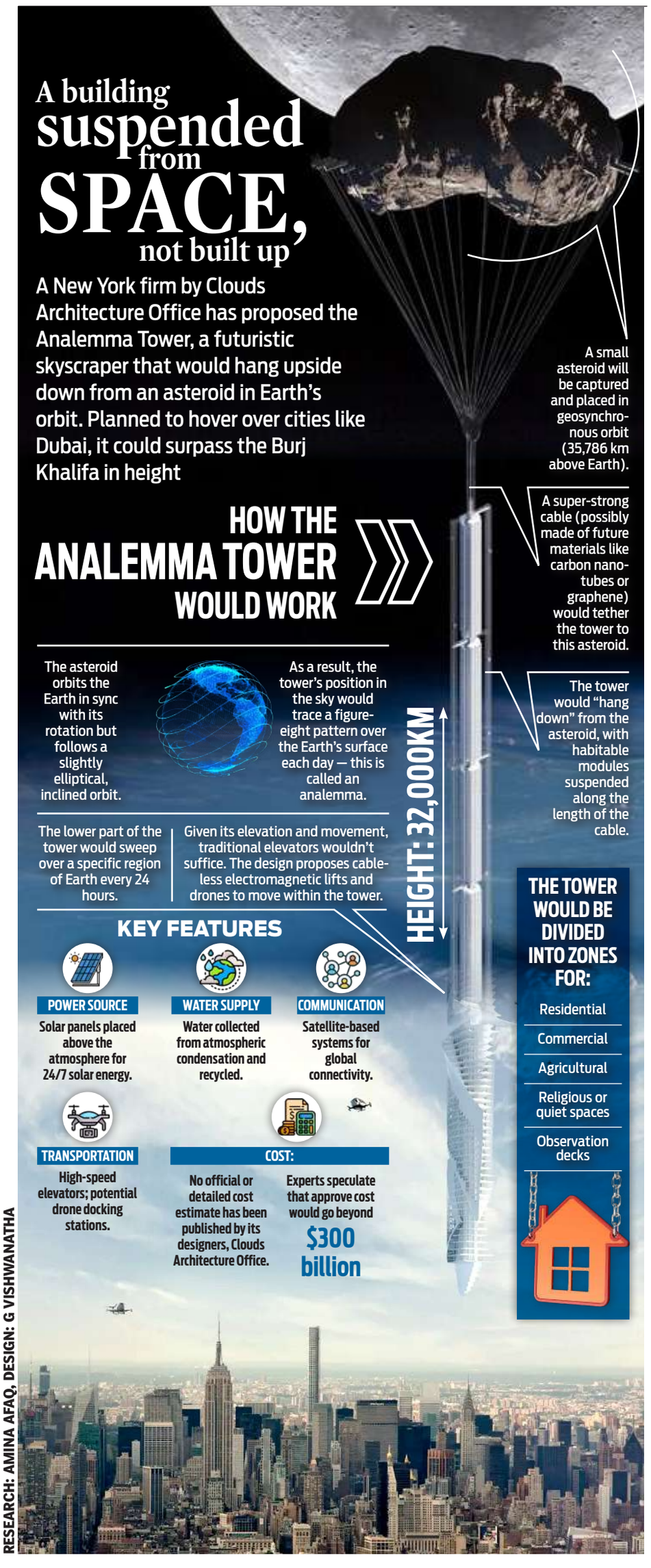
The reactions from the international community, he said, were incredulous: "'Unbelievable!' Oh My God!' Unreal!'" For incoming freshmen who just got accepted to Harvard — and already committed — the timing could not be worse, but they are such strong students that any top university would want to offer them a spot, he said. *—PTI*

Donald Trump *PHOTO: PTI*

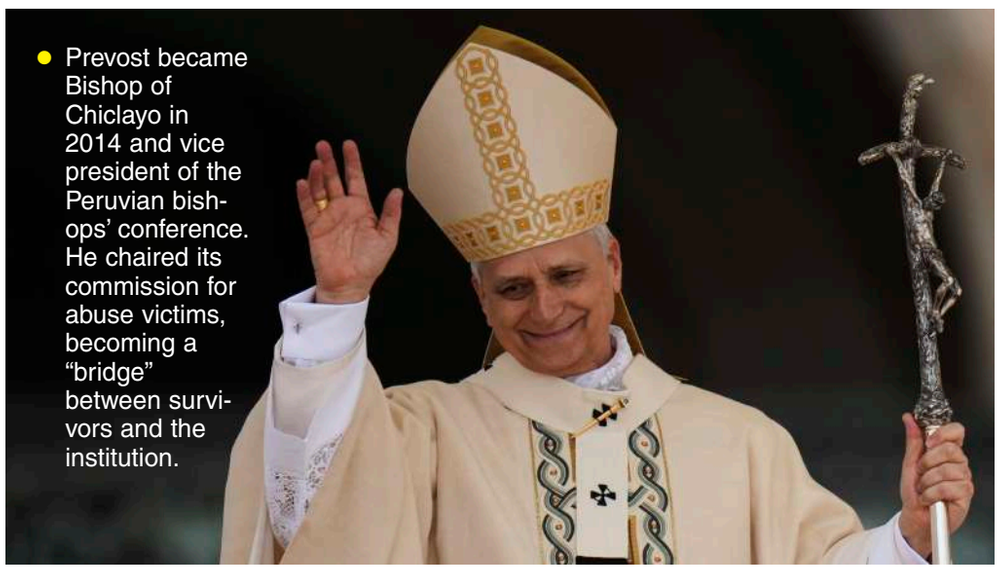
LETTERS

write to us at salarenglish-

SALAR ساڈہ


A building suspended from SPACE, not built up
A New York firm by Clouds Architecture Office has proposed the Analemma Tower, a futuristic skyscraper that would hang upside down from an asteroid in Earth's orbit. Planned to hover over cities like Dubai, it could surpass the Burj Khalifa in height
A small asteroid will be captured and placed in geosynchronous orbit (35,786 km above Earth).
HOW THE ANALEMMA TOWER WOULD WORK
A super-strong cable (possibly made of future materials like carbon nanotubes or graphene) would tether the tower to this asteroid.
The tower would "hang down" from the asteroid, with habitable modules suspended along the length of the cable.
The asteroid orbits the Earth in sync with its rotation but follows a slightly elliptical, inclined orbit.
As a result, the tower's position in the sky would trace a figure-eight pattern over the Earth's surface each day — this is called an analemma.
HEIGHT: 32,000KM
The lower part of the tower would sweep over a specific region of Earth every 24 hours.
Given its elevation and movement, traditional elevators wouldn't suffice. The design proposes cableless electromagnetic lifts and drones to move within the tower.
KEY FEATURES
POWER SOURCE
Solar panels placed above the atmosphere for 24/7 solar energy.
WATER SUPPLY
Water collected from atmospheric condensation and recycled.
COMMUNICATION
Satellite-based systems for global connectivity.
TRANSPORTATION
High-speed elevators; potential drone docking stations.
COST:
No official or detailed cost estimate has been published by its designers, Clouds Architecture Office.
Experts speculate that approve cost would go beyond $300 billion
THE TOWER WOULD BE DIVIDED INTO ZONES FOR:
Residential
Commercial
Agricultural
Religious or quiet spaces
Observation decks
RESEARCH: AMINA AFAQ, DESIGN: G VISHWANATHA

He helped when others didn't: Abuse victims defend Pope Leo



Prevost became Bishop of Chiclayo in 2014 and vice president of the Peruvian bishops' conference. He chaired its commission for abuse victims, becoming a "bridge" between survivors and the institution.

The Sodalitium Christianae Vitae (SCV), a lay community founded in Peru in 1971, was formally dissolved by Pope Francis earlier this year following a damning Vatican investigation *PHOTO: PTI*

As Pope Leo XIV faces mounting scrutiny over his handling of clerical sexual abuse cases, some of his staunchest defenders are the very victims of a powerful Catholic movement he helped dismantle.

The Sodalitium Christianae Vitae (SCV), a lay community founded in Peru in 1971, was formally dissolved by Pope Francis earlier this year following a damning Vatican investigation. The probe uncovered cult-like spiritual, physical and sexual abuses inflicted by SCV leaders upon its members. Despite Pope Leo — formerly Bishop Robert Prevost — now being the target of a defamation campaign, victims credit him with being a rare Church leader who took their allegations seriously and acted upon them.

Beginning in 2018, then-Bishop Prevost met with SCV victims in Peru. He not only listened but also pushed for Vatican involvement and facilitated financial reparations. Victims point to a 2022 meeting he arranged between one of their advocates and Pope Francis as the turning point that triggered the Vatican's investigation and eventual suppression of the group.

"What can I say about him? That he listened to me," said Jose Rey de Castro, a former member who served as personal cook to SCV founder Luis Fernando Figari. "It seems obvious for a priest. But that's not the case, because the Sodalitium was very powerful."

A Conservative army for God

Founded by Peruvian layman Luis Fernando Figari, SCV aimed to recruit "soldiers for God" as a conservative counter to the leftist liberation theology movement sweeping Latin America. At its peak, the group had around 1,000 core members and thousands more in affiliated branches across South America and the US, including a base in Denver.

By 2000, accounts of Figari's abusive practices began to surface. In 2011, a formal complaint was submitted to the Lima archdiocese, but little action followed. Public attention escalated with the 2015 publication of 'Half Monks, Half Soldiers' by former SCV member Pedro Salinas and journalist Paola Ugaz. The book detailed systemic abuse, including sexual violence, physical punishments, and psychological manipulation.

A 2017 report commissioned by SCV's new leadership confirmed Figari had sodomised recruits, forced sexual acts, and derived satisfaction from their pain and humiliation. Yet for years, survivors faced stonewalling from both the Peruvian hierarchy and the Holy See.

Prevost stands out

Prevost became Bishop of Chiclayo in 2014 and vice president of the Peruvian bishops' conference. He chaired its commission for abuse victims, becoming a "bridge" between survivors and the institution. Rey de Castro turned to Prevost in 2021 after criticising SCV's 2016 reparations programme, which offered roughly $6.5 million in combined academic, psychological and financial support to nearly 100 victims.

Following their meeting, Prevost helped negotiate a confidential settlement between Rey de Castro and the group.

Salinas and Ugaz credit Prevost with protecting them when SCV allies retaliated legally. In 2018, SCV Archbishop Jose Eguren sued Salinas for defamation. Prevost, alongside the Vatican's ambassador, pushed the Peruvian bishops to issue a statement supporting the journalists—the first public rebuke of SCV by Church leadership.

"He was the first to do something publicly against the Sodalitium," Ugaz said.

Prevost also played a key role in securing her 10 November, 2022, meeting with Pope Francis. There, Ugaz presented her findings and persuaded the Pope to dispatch senior sex abuse investigators to Peru.

The Vatican probe led to a series of actions, beginning with the April 2024 resignation of Eguren, which Prevost oversaw. The investigation concluded with the expulsion of Figari, Eguren, and nine others, and the formal dissolution of SCV just before Pope Francis's death.

In an April statement, the group said: "With sorrow and obedience, we accept this decision, specifically approved by Pope Francis, which brings our society to an end." They also asked forgiveness for "the mistreatment and abuse committed within our community."

The group did not respond to queries regarding Prevost's role.

Leo now a target

Prevost's defenders say his actions made him enemies—especially among SCV sympathisers. In a recent episode of his 'La Mula' podcast, Salinas read aloud seven years of private correspondence between Prevost and survivors, illustrating trust and gratitude. However, Salinas also noted a growing defamation campaign aimed at tarnishing Leo's reputation, particularly concerning his handling of other abuse cases.

A focal point is a 2022 allegation by three sisters against a priest in Prevost's Chiclayo diocese. The diocese and Vatican maintain that Prevost followed protocol — removing the priest from ministry, reporting the case to Rome's sex crimes office, offering psychological support, and encouraging the women to contact civil authorities. Peruvian prosecutors shelved the case due to the statute of limitations, and the Vatican archived it citing insufficient evidence. Nevertheless, media pressure led to the case being reopened in 2023. Victims' advocacy groups are now demanding transparency and accountability from Pope Leo XIV. Despite the controversy, survivors of SCV say Pope Leo's record with them speaks for itself. "He was the only one who took the time to see us as people, not problems," said one former member. "That's why we still stand by him." *—PTI*

Power outage disrupts Cannes film festival

CANNES, 24 MAY

A significant power outage impacted southeastern France on Saturday, causing severe disruptions at the Cannes Film Festival and local traffic chaos as the event prepared to award its prestigious top prize. Approximately 160,000 homes in the Alpes-Maritimes area lost electricity following the collapse of a high-voltage line in the morning, according to electricity network operator RTE. This outage occurred shortly after a fire at an electrical substation near Cannes strained the grid. Festival officials confirmed that the outage briefly affected activities, though the Palais des Festivals switched to an independent power source. "All scheduled events, including the Closing Ceremony, will proceed as planned," they stated. Traffic lights in Cannes and Antibes failed, causing congestion. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

UN: Guatemala prosecutor is misusing law

GUATEMALA CITY, 24 MAY

A United Nations expert has warned that Guatemala's prosecutor's office is increasingly exploiting criminal law to target former prosecutors, judges, defence lawyers, and journalists. Margaret Satterthwaite, the UN Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, concluded her two-week visit by highlighting a systematic pattern of discrimination against those challenging corruption and defending human rights. Satterthwaite reported that over 60 justice operators and lawyers have faced criminal charges, leading to the exile of more than 50. In a meeting with the chief prosecutor, Consuelo Porras, she was met with denial of these claims, with Porras asserting that their actions align with legal norms. *—PTI*

China intensifies military activity around Taiwan

TAIPEI, 24 MAY

Taiwan's Ministry of National Defence (MND) reported a significant rise in military activities by China, detecting eight People's Liberation Army (PLA) aircraft, 13 naval vessels, and two official ships operating around Taiwan early Saturday. Of these, six PLA aircraft crossed the median line into Taiwan's northern, southwestern, and eastern Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ). This follows Friday's report of 20 PLA aircraft and seven naval vessels, with 18 sorties also crossing the median line. *—ANI*

Scotland condemns China's blocking of Dalai Lama

EDINBURGH, 24 MAY

The Scottish Parliament has expressed its commitment to supporting religious freedoms in Tibet, particularly concerning the reincarnation of the 14th Dalai Lama. During a recent session, MSP Ross Greer raised concerns over potential Chinese interference in the Dalai Lama's future reincarnation, referencing the abduction of the Panchen Lama decades ago. Minister for Equalities Kaukab Stewart affirmed that the Scottish Government supports the Tibetan Buddhist community's right to autonomously choose the next Dalai Lama without external influence. Since the 1950s, Tibetans in China have experienced persecution following the Chinese government's annexation of Tibet. The uprising of 1959 resulted in the Dalai Lama's exile. Tibetan culture, language, and religion have been systematically suppressed. Numerous reports indicate that within China, monasteries are strictly regulated. *—ANI*

Police officers investigate fragments of a Russian drone at the site of a residential building damaged after a Russian attack in Kyiv, Ukraine, on Saturday PHOTO: PTI

Kyiv comes under large-scale Russian drone, missile attack

This was soon after mass prisoner exchange

KYIV, 24 MAY

Ukraine's capital came under a large-scale Russian drone and missile attack overnight and into early Saturday that left at least 15 people injured, according to Ukrainian officials. Explosions and machine gun fire were heard throughout Kyiv as many sought shelter in subway stations.

The attack came as Russia and Ukraine exchanged hundreds of soldiers and civilians, the first phase of a swap agreed on at a meeting in Istanbul last week.

The agreement was a rare moment of cooperation in otherwise failed efforts to reach a ceasefire in the 3-year-old war.

Russia attacked Ukraine with 14 ballistic missiles and 250 Shahed drones overnight, officials said, adding that Ukrainian forces shot down 6 missiles and neutralized 245 drones. Of those, 128 drones were shot down and 117 were thwarted using electronic warfare.

The Kyiv City Military Administration said it was one of the most massive combined missile and drone attacks on the capital.

"A difficult night for all of us," the administration said in a statement.

The debris of intercepted missiles and drones fell in at least six city districts of the Ukrainian capital. According to the acting head of Kyiv's military administration, Tymur Tkachenko, six people required medical care after the attack and two fires were sparked in the Solomianskyi district of Kyiv.

The Obolon district, where a residential building was heavily damaged in the attack, was the hardest hit. There were at least five wounded in the area, the administration said.

Yurii Bondarchuk, a local resident, said the air raid siren "started as usual, then the drones started to fly around as they constantly do".

Moments later, he heard a boom and saw shattered glass fly through the air.

The air raid alert in Kyiv lasted more than seven hours, warning of incoming missiles and drones. *—PTI*

US takes first steps in easing sanctions on Syria

WASHINGTON, 24 MAY

The Trump administration granted Syria sweeping exemptions from sanctions Friday in a big first step toward fulfilling the President's pledge to lift a half-century of penalties on a country shattered by 13 years of civil war.

The sanctions, known as the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act, had aimed to isolate Syria's previous rulers by effectively expelling those doing business with them.

They specifically block postwar reconstruction to make investors wary of reconstruction projects.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said in a statement Friday that in return for sanctions relief, President Donald Trump expects "prompt action by the Syrian government".

Last week, a State Department proposal laid out a three-phase road map with temporary, partial relief initially and setting sweeping conditions for Syrians to meet for any future phases of relief or permanent lifting of sanctions, an official had said.

Removing "Palestinian terror groups" from Syria is first on the list of conditions to get to the second phase.

Other conditions are for Syria to take custody of detention facilities housing Islamic State fighters and to move forward on absorbing a US-backed Kurdish force into the Syrian Army.

To get to phase three, Syria would be required to join the Abraham Accords — normalised relations with Israel — and prove that it had destroyed the previous government's chemical weapons. *—PTI*

> **I had an understanding with (Apple CEO) Tim (Cook) that he wouldn't be doing this. He said he's going to India to build plants. I said, 'That's okay to go to India, but you're not going to sell into here without tariffs.'**
>
> —Donald Trump, US President

Pentagon further restricts press

WASHINGTON, 24 MAY

Confused by leaks to the media during his short tenure, US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth issued a series of restrictions on the press late Friday that include banning reporters from entering wide swaths of the Pentagon without a government escort — areas where the press has had access in past administrations.

Newly restricted areas include his office and those of his top aides and all of the different locations across the mammoth building where the Army, Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps and Space Force maintain press offices. Press will also be barred from offices of the Pentagon's senior military leadership, including Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen Dan Caine, without Hegseth's approval and an escort from his aides. The staff of the Joint Chiefs has traditionally maintained a good relationship with the press. *—PTI*

White House to overhaul National Security Council

Trump is ordering a massive overhaul of the National Security Council that will shrink its size and return many career appointees back to their home agencies, sources said. The move is expected to significantly reduce the number of staff at the NSC, according to the officials. Secretary of State Marco Rubio has been serving as national security adviser since early this month following the ouster of Mike Waltz.

Trump signs executive orders to boost nuclear power

Trump signed executive orders intended to quadruple domestic production of nuclear power within the next 25 years, a goal that experts said the US is unlikely to reach. The orders grant the US Energy Secretary authority to approve advanced reactor designs and projects, taking authority away from independent safety agency. Trump called nuclear a "hot industry," adding, "It's time for nuclear, and we're going to do it very big."

Yunus to continue as B'desh Interim Chief

DHAKA, 24 MAY

Bangladesh's interim government chief Muhammad Yunus on Saturday called an unscheduled meeting of the advisory council to review a brewing unease involving his administration, political parties and the Army, according to media reports.

It came shortly after Yunus expressed his desire to step down as chief adviser, citing difficulties in working amid the failure of political parties to find common ground for change.

Following the meeting, one of his advisers said Yunus will remain as the head of Bangladesh's interim government.

"He (Yunus) didn't say he will leave. He said that while we face many obstacles in carrying out the work and responsibilities assigned to us, we are overcoming them," Planning Adviser Wahiduddin Mahmud told press after the meeting. "He (Yunus) is definitely staying."

He added that none of the advisers were going anywhere as "the responsibility entrusted to us is a significant one; we cannot abandon this duty".

Rumours of Yunus's resignation came amid reports of discord between the military and the interim government over the proposed humanitarian passage to Myanmar's rebel-held Rakhine corridor.

Army chief General Waker-Uz-Zaman, Navy and Air Force chiefs met Yunus five days ago and reportedly reiterated their call for election by December this year and conveyed their reservation about the corridor issue. *—PTI*

IMF says talks with Pak 'constructive', to hold more

ISLAMABAD, 24 MAY

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) said on Saturday that it held "constructive discussions" with Pakistani authorities on the upcoming budget while committing to continue talks in the coming days.

The IMF team started high-level policy talks in Islamabad on 19 May to discuss the FY 2025-26 budget, which went on for days but apparently were inconclusive, forcing the government to delay the announcement of the budget till 10 June.

"We held constructive discussions with the authorities on their FY2026 budget proposals and broader economic policy, and reform agenda supported by the 2024 Extended Fund Facility (EFF) and the 2025 Resilience and Sustainability Facility (RSF)," the IMF's mission chief Nathan Porter said in a statement.

- Pakistan and the IMF signed a USD 7 billion EFF loan last year and the country so far received two tranches, with the second one disbursed earlier this month

"We will continue discussions towards agreeing over the authorities' budget over the coming days," it added.

The current discussions were focused on actions to enhance revenue, including bolstering compliance and expanding the tax base and prioritising expenditure.

Pakistan and the IMF signed a USD 7 billion EFF loan last year and the country so far received two tranches, with the second one disbursed this month. *—PTI*

Komagata Maru highlights Canada's shortcomings: PM

OTTAWA, 24 MAY

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney marked the 1914 Komagata Maru incident as a poignant reminder of Canada's historical shortcomings in upholding its core values. Speaking on Friday, he urged Canadians to ensure that such injustices are never repeated and to strive towards a future where inclusion is a tangible reality, rather than merely a slogan.

The Komagata Maru, a Japanese steamship, arrived in Vancouver harbour in 1914 carrying 376 Indian immigrants seeking refuge and dignity. However, Canadian authorities employed exclusionary and discriminatory laws to deny them entry. Carney recounted the plight of the passengers, who were detained for two months aboard the ship, deprived of food, water, and medical care. Upon their forced return to India, many faced imprisonment or even death.

"The Komagata Maru tragedy is a stark reminder of how Canada has fallen short in moments of its history," Carney said. "Let this solemn anniversary serve as a call of remembrance and conscience. To honour the past is to learn from it, and to learn from it is to act." *—PTI*

Singapore govt to engage honestly with US-China: PM Wong

SINGAPORE, 24 MAY

Following his newly re-elected government's swearing-in, Prime Minister Lawrence Wong emphasised the importance of building constructive relationships with major powers, particularly the US and China, while navigating their rivalry responsibly. He stressed the need for "honest engagement" to secure an "assured place" for Singapore in an increasingly competitive global landscape.

Wong highlighted that where interests align, Singapore would collaborate with both nations, yet firmly protect its security and sovereignty when they do not.

He stated, "In a world of shifting alliances, we will be a steady and constructive partner, contributing to peace and stability, and supporting a rules-based global order."

Looking beyond traditional partners, Wong indicated Singapore's intention to strengthen ties with nations in Africa and South America.

He plans to review economic strategies to ensure the country retains its competitive edge and create quality jobs for Singaporeans amid global economic uncertainty.

Additionally, Wong reaffirmed the nation's commitment to maintaining racial and religious harmony, as well as accelerating the transition to renewable energy and addressing climate change challenges. *—PTI*

THE HORRORS CONTINUE

Israel's use of human shields is rampant, soldiers say

TEL AVIV, 24 MAY

Several Palestinians and soldiers said that Israeli troops are systematically forcing Palestinians to act as human shields in Gaza, sending them into buildings and tunnels to check for explosives or militants. The dangerous practice has become ubiquitous during 19 months of war, they said.

In response to these allegations, Israel's military says it strictly prohibits using civilians as shields — a practice it has long accused Hamas of using in Gaza. Israeli officials blame the militants for the tens of thousands of civilian Palestinians casualties.

However, three interviewed members of Israel's military admitted to engaging in the practice, even though it is prohibited by international law.

"These are not isolated accounts; they point to a systemic failure and a horrifying moral collapse," said Nadav Weiman, Executive Director of Breaking the Silence — a whistleblower group of former Israeli soldiers that has collected testimonies about the practice from within the military. "Israel rightly condemns Hamas for using civilians as human shields, but our own soldiers describe doing the very same."

Ayman Abu Hamadan, a Palestinians recounted, saying the only times he wasn't bound or blindfolded was when he was used by Israeli soldiers as their human shield.

Dressed in army fatigues with a camera fixed to his forehead, Hamadan was forced into houses in the Gaza Strip to make sure they were clear of bombs and gunmen, he said. When one unit finished with him, he was passed to the next.

The Israeli army had strapped an injured Palestinian man to a military vehicle to use as a human shield PHOTO: X

A soldier who spoke Breaking the Silence — said commanders were aware of the practice and tolerated it, with some giving orders to do so.

Some said it was referred to as the "mosquito protocol" and that Palestinians were referred to as "wasps" and other dehumanising terms.

Rights groups say Israel has used Palestinians as shields in Gaza and the West Bank for decades.

One report documented the accidental killing of a Palestinian: troops didn't realise another unit was using him as a shield and shot him as he ran into a house. *—PTI*

Brothers reunite as human shields

Masoud Abu Saeed said he was used as a shield for two weeks in March 2024 in the southern city of Khan Younis. "This is extremely dangerous," he recounted telling a soldier. "I have children and want to reunite with them." The 36-year-old said he was forced into houses, buildings and a hospital to dig up suspected tunnels and clear areas. He said he wore a first-responder vest for easy identification, carrying a phone, hammer and chain cutters. During one operation, he bumped into his brother, used as a shield by another unit, he said. They hugged. "I thought Israel's army had executed him," he said.

Over 16L new workers enrolled under ESI scheme

NEW DELHI, 24 MAY

In a significant indication of formal job creation in the country, about 16.33 lakh new workers were enrolled under the Employees' State Insurance (ESI) Scheme in March 2025, according to data released by Ministry of Law and Justice. On Friday, the Ministry of Law and Justice said in a release that 7.96 lakh new registrations are coming from employees aged up to 25. The data suggests an encouraging uptick in first-time job entrants in the formal sector. It suggests growing female participation in workforce, as 3.61 lakh women employees were enrolled under the scheme during the same period. Ministry of Law and Justice data further reveals that about 100 transgender employees were registered under the scheme in March.—*ANI*

Delhi airport runway to be closed till June

NEW DELHI, 24 MAY

Civil Aviation Minister K Rammohan Naidu on Friday said discussions are going on with stakeholders, including airlines, to ensure minimal impact on scheduled flights due to the planned temporary closure of a runway at Delhi airport in June. As per the approved plan, runway RW 28/10 will be closed again from mid-June to mid-September 2025, following the peak tourist season, when wind direction is also expected to shift. The runway will be shut for carrying out instrument landing system (ILS) upgrade. Naidu said the ministry is discussing with stakeholders, including airlines, on how to ensure minimal impact on the scheduled flights due to the closure of the runway. The Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGIA), the country's largest and busiest airport, handles around 1,300 flight movements daily —*PTI*

Power Min urges states to install smart meters

NEW DELHI, 24 MAY

Union Power Minister Manohar Lal on Friday directed states to "saturate" installation of prepaid smart meters in all government establishments, including colonies, by August 2025. The Minister also asked the states to complete installation of smart meters for commercial and industrial consumers and high load consumers by November 2025. Lal made the remarks chairing the Regional Conference for the Southern Region States/UTs in Bengaluru, the Ministry of Power (MoP) said in a statement. He further said such regional conferences will help identify specific challenges and possible solutions. He mentioned the importance of encouraging energy-conscious behaviour and using energy-efficient appliances for energy sustainability. Lal said states should including addition of nuclear generation capacity. —*PTI*

Domestic air passenger traffic rises 10%

NEW DELHI, 24 MAY

Domestic air travel in India continued its upward trajectory, with passenger traffic recording a 10.2 per cent year-on-year increase in April 2025, according to a recent report by ratings agency ICRA. An estimated 14.55 million domestic air passengers were reported for the month, up from 13.2 million in April 2024. However, the growth remained flat compared to the previous month. ICRA highlighted that airline capacity deployment was 6.9 per cent higher year-on-year in April 2025, yet saw a 4.2 per cent decrease from March 2025, indicating a slight slowdown in available seat capacity.For the 2024-25 financial year, approximately 165.38 million domestic air passengers were recorded, marking a 7.6 per cent increase over FY24 and a 16.8 per cent rise compared to pre-COVID levels of around 141.56 million in FY20. —*ANI*

RBI approves ₹2.69L cr dividend to Centre

This is the highest ever payout by the RBI

MUMBAI, 24 MAY

- The Reserve Bank of India's (RBI's) central board has approved a record Rs 2.69 lakh crore surplus transfer to the central government for the fiscal year 2024-25.

The Reserve Bank of India's (RBI's) central board has approved a record Rs 2.69 lakh crore surplus transfer to the central government for the fiscal year 2024-25.

A decision in this regard was taken in the 616th Meeting of the Central Board of the Reserve Bank of India on Friday.

This is the highest-ever surplus transfer by the RBI to the government for fiscal 2024-25 (FY25).

RBI in the financial year ending March 2024 transferred Rs 2.1 lakh crore to the centre.

RBI said in a statement, "The Board thereafter approved the transfer of Rs 2,68,590.07 crore as surplus to the Central Government for the accounting year 2024-25."

During accounting years 2018-19 to 2021-22, owing to the prevailing macroeconomic conditions and the onslaught of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Central Board had decided to maintain the CRB at 5.50 per cent of Reserve Bank's Balance Sheet size to support growth and overall economic activity.

The CRB was increased to 6.00 per cent for FY 2022-23 and to 6.50 per cent for FY 2023-24.

"Based on the revised ECF and taking into consideration the macroeconomic assessment, the Central Board decided to further increase the CRB to 7.50 per cent," the RBI statement added.

In its statement, the RBI added that the Central Board at the 616th Meeting reviewed the global and domestic economic scenario, including risks to the outlook.

The Board also discussed the working of the Reserve Bank during the year April 2024 - March 2025 and approved the Reserve Bank's Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year 2024-25.

Commenting on the announcement, Gaura Sengupta, Chief Economist at IDFC FIRST Bank, said, "The RBI dividend was in line with our expectations at Rs 2.7 tn vs last year's dividend of Rs 2.1 tn (IDFC First Bank estimate of INR 2.6 tn to Rs 3tn)." —*ANI*

HOT MONEY MOVEMENT

FPIs withdraw ₹4,784 cr from Indian equities

MUMBAI, 24 MAY

PHOTO: PTI

Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) have emerged as net sellers in the Indian equity markets, offloading shares worth Rs 4,784.32 crore from 19 to 23 May according to data released by the National Securities Depository Limited (NSDL). This activity has notably decreased net inflows for May, which now total Rs 13,835 crore, a decline from the Rs 18,620 crore recorded in the previous week.

The week began positively, with robust inflows on Monday and Tuesday; however, selling peaked on Wednesday, 21 May, when FPIs sold assets exceeding Rs 10,000 crore in a single day. Cumulatively, the net FPI investment in Indian equities for 2025 has shifted to a net outflow of Rs 98,516 crore, indicating continued caution among foreign investors amid global uncertainties.

Experts assert that the current selling trend likely stems from external pressures rather than fundamental issues within the Indian markets. Ajay Bagga, a banking and market analyst, noted that turmoil in global bond markets might be compelling leveraged and carry trade funds to withdraw profits from Indian equities to meet liquidity needs elsewhere. He also suggested that FPIs could be engaging in tactical manoeuvres relating to option pricing, explaining the observed selling patterns in major stocks.

Analysts interpret these outflows as movements of "hot money," indicative of quick, speculative investments rather than signs of deteriorating economic fundamentals in India. NSDL data further reveals that net investments by FPIs in Indian equities were Rs 4,223 crore in April, suggesting a potential recovery in foreign investment trends after previous monthly sell-offs. —*ANI*

Blue Water sets IPO price at ₹132

NEW DELHI, 24 MAY

Multimodal transport operator Blue Water Logistics on Saturday said it has fixed a price band at Rs 132–135 per share for its Rs 40.5-crore initial public offering, which will hit capital markets on 27 May.

The initial share sale will conclude on 29 May, and the shares will be listed on the NSE Emerge platform, the company said in a statement. Investors can bid for a minimum of 1,000 equity shares and in multiples thereof, it added.

The initial public offering (IPO) is entirely a fresh issue of up to 30 lakh shares. At the upper end of the price band, the company will fetch around Rs 40.50 crore.

The company intends to utilise Rs 10.51 crore of the net proceeds to fund capital expenditure requirements and Rs 20 crore for working capital requirements.

Funds will also be used for general corporate purposes. —*PTI*

LEELA PALACES RAISES ₹ 1,575 CR FROM ANCHOR INVESTORS

NEW DELHI, 24 MAY

Schloss Bangalore Ltd, the operator of Leela Palaces Hotels and Resorts, has raised Rs 1,575 crore from anchor investors just days before its initial public offering (IPO) opens for public subscription. The anchor book has attracted substantial interest from domestic institutional investors such as HDFC Mutual Fund, ICICI Prudential MF, and Aditya Birla Sun Life Insurance Company, along with global entities like Fidelity and Norges Bank.

The company allotted 36,206,896 equity shares to 47 funds at Rs 435 each. The IPO, priced between Rs 413- Rs 435 per share, will be available for public subscription from May 26-28. Schloss Bangalore's Rs 3,500-crore IPO consists of a fresh equity issue of Rs 2,500 crore and an offer for sale of Rs 1,000 crore by its promoter, Project Ballet Bangalore Holdings. —*PTI*

TWICE IN A MONTH

Goyal meets EU counterpart again on FTA talks

NEW DELHI, 24 MAY

Piyush Goyal with EU's Maros Sefcovic PHOTO: PTI

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal has met European Commissioner for Trade Maros Sefcovic in Brussels, marking their second meeting in just a month to advance discussions on the proposed free trade agreement (FTA) currently under negotiation between India and the European Union.

Goyal arrived in Brussels on 23 May from Washington, joining India's chief negotiator L Satya Srinivas and his team, who are already engaged in FTA discussions at the EU headquarters. The Indian minister previously met with his EU counterpart earlier this month.

In a post on X, Sefcovic expressed optimism about the negotiations, stating, "Delighted to welcome my friend and counterpart @PiyushGoyal. We continue to make progress. Let's maintain the momentum – with hard work, clear focus – and I look forward to our next meeting soon." Goyal responded, affirming India's commitment to shared prosperity with the EU, urging to "keep this pace going!"

These discussions are particularly significant as India and the 27-member EU aim to conclude an early harvest trade agreement by July, which may include provisions on intellectual property rights, government procurement, tariffs, and non-tariff barriers.

The two sides recently wrapped up the eleventh round of negotiations on 16 May. —*PTI*

RBI FINES UNION BANK FOR NON-COMPLIANCE

NEW DELHI, 24 MAY

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday said it has imposed penalties on Union Bank of India and Transactree Technologies for non-compliance with certain regulatory norms.

A penalty of Rs 63.6 lakh has been imposed on Union Bank of India for non-compliance with the certain provisions of Banking Regulation Act, 1949 and certain directions on "Credit Flow to Agriculture -- Collateral free Agricultural Loans", the RBI said.

In another statement, it said a penalty of Rs 40 lakh has been imposed on Transactree Technologies Pvt Ltd for non-compliance with certain provisions of "Non-Banking Financial Company -- Peer to Peer Lending Platform Directions, 2017." —*PTI*

RBI to cut fiscal deficit to 4.2% of GDP: SBI

NEW DELHI, 24 MAY

A recent report by the State Bank of India (SBI) suggests that the central government's fiscal deficit could decline from the budgeted level of 4.5 per cent of GDP to 4.2 per cent, thanks to a substantial dividend transfer from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

The Union Budget for 2025-26 had anticipated a dividend income of Rs 2.56 lakh crore from the RBI and public sector financial institutions. However, with recent transfers, actual revenue is expected to surpass these projections. This additional funding provides the government with greater fiscal flexibility, allowing for either a reduction in the deficit or increased investment in priority sectors.

SBI stated, "We expect the fiscal deficit to ease by 20 to 30 basis points to 4.2 per cent of GDP," noting that the generous dividend transfer not only bolsters the government's fiscal standing but also aids in managing the yield curve amid global financial uncertainties.

The report explains that the RBI's surplus stems mainly from its liquidity adjustment facility operations and interest gained from domestic and foreign securities.

Looking ahead, durable liquidity is anticipated to remain in surplus in FY26, further supporting fiscal measures and developmental initiatives. —*ANI*

On 20 January, a total of 4,52,839 agents of LIC successfully completed and issued an astounding 5,88,107 life insurance policies PHOTO: PTI

LIC sets Guinness record for highest sales

NEW DELHI, 24 MAY

Life Insurance Corporation of India on Saturday said it has earned a Guinness World Record title for most life insurance policies sold in 24 hours.

This historic achievement, verified by Guinness World Records, recognises the extraordinary performance of the corporation's dedicated agency network on 20 January, 2025, LIC said in a statement.

On 20 January, a total of 4,52,839 agents of LIC successfully completed and issued an astounding 5,88,107 life insurance policies across India, it noted. This monumental effort established a new global benchmark for agent productivity in the life insurance industry within 24 hours, it said.

The record attempt was the culmination of an initiative by LIC MD and CEO Siddhartha Mohanty, appealing to every agent to complete at least one policy on "Mad Million Day" on 20 January, 2025. —*PTI*

SC stays Rs 5,712 crore GST notice against Paytm

MUMBAI, 24 MAY

The Supreme Court has granted a stay on a Rs 5,712-crore GST notice sent to fintech firm One97 Communications-owned real money gaming platform First Games, a regulatory filing said on Saturday.

The Directorate General of GST Intelligence, New Delhi had issued a show cause notice (SCN) to First Games in April.

"We hereby inform you that First Games has informed us on 24 May, 2025 at 10.44am (IST) that in the writ petition ...filed by First Games challenging the said SCN, the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India has on 23 May, 2025 stayed the proceedings of the SCN," the regulatory filing said.

One97 Communications, which owns Paytm brand said the tax matter is an industry-wide issue and not limited to First Games and the matter is being heard by the apex court. —*PTI*

EVEN WITH TARIFFS

'India-made iPhones will be cheaper in US'

NEW DELHI, 24MAY

Recent reports suggest that Apple is gearing up to locally manufacture the iPhone 15 Plus in the upcoming quarter, following the successful commencement of iPhone 15 production in India. PHOTO: X

Even if the United States were to impose a 25 per cent tariff on iPhones manufactured in India, the total production cost would still be much lower if compared with manufacturing the devices in the U.S, according to a report by Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI).

This comes amid a statement by US President Donald Trump, threatening to impose 25 per cent tariffs on iPhones if Apple decides to make it in India. However, the GTRI report showed that manufacturing in India remains cost-effective, despite such duties.

The report breaks down the current value chain of a USD 1,000 iPhone, which involves contributions from over a dozen countries. Apple retains the largest share of the value, about USD 450 per device, through its brand, software, and design. GTRI stated that China and India, despite being major players of iPhone assembly, earn only around USD 30 per device. This is less than 3 per cent of the total retail price of an iPhone. The report argues that manufacturing iPhones in India is still economically viable even if a 25 per cent tariff is applied.

This is mainly because of the sharp difference in labour costs between India and the US. In India, assembly workers earn approximately USD 230 per month, while in the US states like California, labour costs could soar to around USD 2,900 per month due to minimum wage laws, a 13-fold increase. As a result, assembling an iPhone in India costs about USD 30, while the same process in the US would cost around USD 390. —*ANI*

Patidar, Cummins fined ₹ 24 lakh, ₹ 12 lakh

LUCKNOW, 24 MAY

Royal Challengers Bengaluru skipper Rajat Patidar and Sunrisers Hyderabad captain Pat Cummins have been fined for their respective teams' slow over-rate during their Indian Premier League match here. While Cummins was fined Rs 12 lakh as it was his team's first offence of the season under the IPL's Code of Conduct, Patidar was docked Rs 24 lakh as a member of the playing XI of the second-time offender RCB. "As it was his team's second offence of the season under the IPL's Code of Conduct relating to minimum over-rate offences, Patidar was fined Rs 24 lakhs," said the IPL in a statement.—*PTI*

PHOTO: X

1st Lebanese player Hassan qualifies for French Open

PARIS, 24 MAY

Benjamin Hassan made history by becoming the first Lebanese tennis player in the Open era to qualify for the main draw of the French Open. The 30-year-old defeated Japan's James Trotter 6-2, 7-6 (5) in the final round of qualifying. Germany-born Hassan secured his place at Roland-Garros by winning three straight matches in the qualifying tournament on the clay courts of Paris. Ranked No. 177 in the world, Hassan is no stranger to breaking new ground for Lebanese tennis. Last summer, at the Paris Olympics, which also took place on the clay courts of Roland-Garros, Hassan became the first player to represent Lebanon.—*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Rookie Hitaashee rises to fourth with day's best round

ÉVIAN-LES-BAINS, 24 MAY

Indian rookie Hitaashee Bakshi registered her best round on the Ladies European Tour as she played five under 66 to rise to tied fourth on the second day of the Jabra Ladies Open 2025 here.Hitaashee with 72-66 was four-under and three behind the leader, Chiara Tamburlini of Switzerland, who had rounds of 67 and 68. Hitaashee's 66 was the best card of he day.As Hitaashee moved into contention, the other three Indians, Diksha Dagar (71) at T-30, Avani Prashanth (72) at T-35, and Tvesa Malik (70) at T-43, also cut. That made it four out of four Indians into the final round.Playing her first season on a limited card —*PTI*

Late equalizer stops Betis' win in warmup

SEVILLE, 24 MAY

Real Betis was denied a last La Liga win of the season by a late Valencia equalizer before next week's Europa League Conference final against Chelsea. On-loan Manchester United winger Antony leaned back and curled in a superb left-foot shot into the corner five minutes before halftime to give the home side the advantage. However, substitute Rafa Mir lashed a low shot past Adrian at his near post to make it 1-1. There was little at stake but pride for both teams, with Betis closing its La Liga campaign in sixth place. Valencia was 12th.—*PTI*

Gill India's Test captain, Shami is ruled out

MUMBAI, 24 MAY

Shubman Gill was on Saturday appointed India's new Test captain while Rishabh Pant was named his deputy, starting with the five-match series in England.

The selector's decision on the team's leadership was on expected lines following the retirement of Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli. Young left-hander B Sai Sudharsan earned his maiden Test call-up.

The squad also features Karun Nair, who returns to the national setup after seven years. A notable exclusion was pacer Mohammed Shami, who was deemed not fit enough for the long series.

"Last year or so, we have looked at Shubman (for leadership). We are hopeful he is the guy who is going to take the team forward. It is a high-pressure job, but he is a terrific player. We wish him all the best," said chief selector Ajit Agarkar after announcing the squad.

On Shami, he added: "His workload is not where it needs to be. We were hoping he would be available, but it is unfortunate. At the moment, he is not fully fit. From a tour of Australia, Harshit Rana and Sarfaraz Khan have been dropped.

Squad: Shubman Gill, Rishabh Pant, Yashasvi Jaiswal, KL Rahul, Sai Sudharsan, Abhimanyu Easwaran, Karun nair, Nitish Reddy, Ravindra Kadeja, Dhurv Jurel, Washington Sundar, Shardul Thakur, Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Siraj, Prasidh Krishna, Akash Deep, Arshdeep singh, and Kuldeep Yadav. —*PTI*

GT seek top-two finish, Chennai a consolatory win

Gujarat Titans still control their playoff destiny

AHMEDABAD, 24 MAY

Gujarat Titans would aim to secure a top-two spot while Chennai Super Kings would continue their planning for future when the two teams meet in the Indian Premier League here on Sunday.

With Royal Challengers Bengaluru losing to Sunrisers Hyderabad, the Titans still control their playoff destiny. A win against CSK will take them to 20 points and ensure a top-two berth, giving them two shots at making the final.

For CSK, already out of playoff contention, the focus will remain on building for the future as they look to test younger players and combinations in what has been a season of mixed returns.

The majority of GT's success with the bat has been built around the top three, comprising Shubman Gill, Sai Sudharsan, and Jos Buttler, who would leave for national duty after the team's last league game on Sunday.

With Buttler not being available for the play-offs, the middle-order must get more time.

Shahrukh Khan and Sherfane Rutherford got much-needed runs under their belt against LSG and would be eager to get another hit in the middle.

The bigger concerns for GT lie in the bowling department, with star spinner Rashid Khan far from his best.

M S Dhoni has kept the suspense on his IPL future alive since his international retirement in 2020. —*PTI*

> I was not happy about his performances this IPL season, but I promised to work hard on his game
>
>
>
> -Ishan Kishan, Sunrisers Hyderabad batter

GT VS CSK

HEAD TO HEAD	
PLAYED:	7
GT Won:	4
CSK Won:	3

GT vs CSK Match starts at

KKR VS SRH

HEAD TO HEAD	
PLAYED:	29
KKR Won:	20
SRH Won:	9

KKR vs SRH Match starts at 7.30 pm IST

SRH vs KKR: No context, only pride at stake

NEW DELHI, 24 MAY

Kolkata Knight Riders will have little motivation left when they take on another ousted outfit, Sunrisers Hyderabad, in an inconsequential IPL game here on Sunday.

Call it irony, when KKR and SRH played their last match of the 2024 IPL, it was the grand finale where Shreyas Iyer's team had trumped Pat Cummins' men in a one-sided match.

On Sunday, however, both sides will only have bragging rights there for the taking with at best a sixth-place finish in the offing.

SRH will start as favourites, having thrashed a fancied RCB by 42 runs on Friday night, and will be more than game-ready, unlike KKR, which last took the field against CSK on May 7 at the Eden Gardens. Pat Cummins would like to finish this season on a winning note, and their formidable batting line-up comprising Travis Head, Abhishek Sharma, Ishan Kishan, and Aniket Verma would like to feast on a batting paradise at the Kotla. Ajinkya Rahane's men were supposed to play RCB on May 17, the first match post resumption, but Bengaluru weather not only played spoilsport, it also ended their slim playoff hopes. —*PTI*

Kidambi Srikanth, after entering finals PHOTO: X

MALAYSIA MASTERS

Srikanth enters first final in 6 years

KUALA LUMPUR, 24 MAY

Indian shuttler Kidambi Srikanth stormed into his first men's singles final of a BWF event in six years with a straight-game win over Japan's Yushi Tanaka at the Malaysia Masters Super 500 badminton tournament here on Saturday.

"I'm pretty happy. It's been a while," Srikanth said after the win. This is Srikanth's first final appearance on the BWF World Tour since finishing runner-up at the 2019 India Open. A former world number one, Srikanth, currently ranked 65, has endured a rough patch over the past few seasons due to form and fitness issues. "Physically, I've been feeling well, but also the fact that I haven't played too many matches last year, playing qualifying, so may be kind of lost that touch of playing matches. And yeah, somehow everything worked out this time.

"I've been working hard last month. It's just these wins, after a very long time, that have been my emotions," he added. A naturally gifted shot-maker, Srikanth became the first Indian to win four BWF titles in 2017 and then led India to their first-ever Commonwealth Games gold in the team event. Asked about his plans going forward, Srikanth said: "I haven't planned anything. It's just about being physically fit, being injury-free, and then playing as many tournaments as possible. I don't have a target for playing the next tournaments this year. "So it's just about training and being physically fit, and, if I play, I will play to win. I want to give myself enough time to recover, to train, and then play this time." With some fine straight slices and round-the-head smashes, the Indian closed the gap, but the Japanese kept a five-point cushion with a crisp cross smash. —*PTI*

Aditi Ashok tied 25th at halfway mark in Mexico

PLAYA DEL CARMEN, 24 MAY

India's Aditi Ashok played a second straight round of even par 72 to stay in tied 25th place at the Mexico Riviera Maya Open on the LPGA here.

The 27-year-old Indian, who has had a very modest season, had three birdies and three bogeys in the round.

Aditi has played six events before this week and cut four of them, but has not finished in the Top 30, with the best being a tied 31st at the Black Desert Championship.

Meanwhile, LPGA rookie Jenny Bae made it through an up-and-down stretch around the turn with a birdie on the par-5 18th hole for another 3-under 69, giving her a one-shot lead going into the weekend.

Shubhankar, Veer missed cut in Belgium

Indian golfers Shubhankar Sharma and Veer Ahlawat have failed to make the cut at Soudal Open 2025 here.

It was a rough two days for the Indians as Ahlawat improved on his first 74 with a 69, but still fell short of the cut, which was set at one under. Sharma carded 74-72 and totalled 4-over, way off the cut mark of one-under.

Ahlawat had five birdies against three bogeys, and Sharma had three birdies against four bogeys. —*PTI*

GENEVA OPEN

Djokovic wins 100th tour-level trophy

GENEVA, 24 MAY

Novak Djokovic captured his 100th tour-level trophy on Saturday at the Gonet Geneva Open, where he dug deep in an absorbing championship match.

The former No. 1 player in the PIF ATP Rankings rallied for a 5-7, 7-6(2), 7-6(2) victory over sixth seed Hubert Hurkacz to triumph at the clay-court ATP 250. Djokovic rallied from 2-4 in the deciding set before sealing victory after three hours, five minutes, the longest match of this year's tournament.

With his 100th tour-level trophy, Djokovic joined Jimmy Connors (109) and Roger Federer (103) as the only men in the Open Era to hit the triple-digit mark.

The Serbian claimed his first in Amersfoort in 2006, when he defeated Hurkacz's current coach, Nicolas Massu, in the final.

By securing his first title since winning the gold medal at last year's Paris Olympics, Djokovic became the first man in the Open Era to lift a trophy in 20 different seasons. The 38-year-old is the oldest champion in the Geneva tournament's history. —*PTI*

Novak Djokovic captured his 100th tour-level trophy on Saturday PHOTO: TENNIS.COM

Naraen Pranav wins air rifle bronze

SUHL, 24 MAY

Teenager Naraen Pranav won bronze in the men's 10m air rifle event to give India their fifth medal in the ongoing ISSF Junior World Cup here on Saturday. The Khelo India Youth Games champion shot 227.9 in the final to finish behind Braden Peiser (250.0) of the USA, who claimed silver. China's Huang (250.3) won the gold. To his credit, Pranav remained unfazed by the magnitude of the occasion and the quality of the field to deliver a confident and strong start to the 24-shot match-up, which eventually helped him bag the medal.

MOST UNEXPECTED TROPHY

Lukaku's goal led Napoli to Serie A title win

ROME, 24 MAY

The two players who Antonio Conte wanted more than any others secured Napoli its second Serie A title in three years.

Scott McTominay scored with an acrobatic bicycle kick before halftime, and Romelu Lukaku doubled the lead with a solo goal after the break in the decisive 2-0 home win over Cagliari. Conte became the first coach to win the Italian championship with three different teams. "Everyone contributed to this, but the coach most of all," Napoli captain Giovanni Di Lorenzo said. "Napoli needed him to get back on top. He's phenomenal." Comparing it to his three Serie A titles won at Juventus and one at Inter Milan, not to mention a Premier League title at Chelsea, Conte said it was "the most unexpected, the most difficult, and the most stimulating in terms of the challenge."

Conte also noted how he had to try and convince players to stay when he arrived last June. Napoli needed only to do the same or better than defending champion Inter in the final round of matches, so Inter's 2-0 win at 10-man Como wasn't enough for the Nerazzurri.

Napoli finished Serie A one point ahead of Inter. The southern squad's fourth Serie A title overall capped an impressive turnaround after the Partenopei finished 10th during a dismal title defense last season."The one two years ago was one we were (expecting) for months, whereas this week we had so much anxiety, we couldn't wait to get on the field and win this in front of our fans," said winger Matteo Politano, who provided the cross for McTominay's goal. —*PTI*

Antonio Conte's Napoli win Serie A PHOTO: X

MotoGP British GP: Quartararo seals pole hat-trick

LONDON, 24 MAY

Yamaha's Fabio Quartararo broke a lap record for the third straight MotoGP weekend when he claimed pole position for the British Grand Prix at the Silverstone Circuit on Saturday.

Frenchman Quartararo will be joined on the front row by Gresini Racing's Alex Marquez and Ducati's Francesco Bagnaia, while world championship leader Marc Marquez is off the front row for the first time this season, going only fourth-fastest.

In cloudy conditions, Quartararo set a searing pace on his final attempt to break the lap record, clocking one minute and 57.233 seconds to improve Yamaha's chances of claiming a first win this season. "Looks close, but it (a victory) is still far. On one lap, we're starting to feel fast, the confidence I have is good," said Quartararo, who had also started on pole at the Spanish and French Grands Prix.

"I'm feeling good, we're taking good steps. Of course, the next goal is to get closer in the sprint and closer in the race." —*PTI*